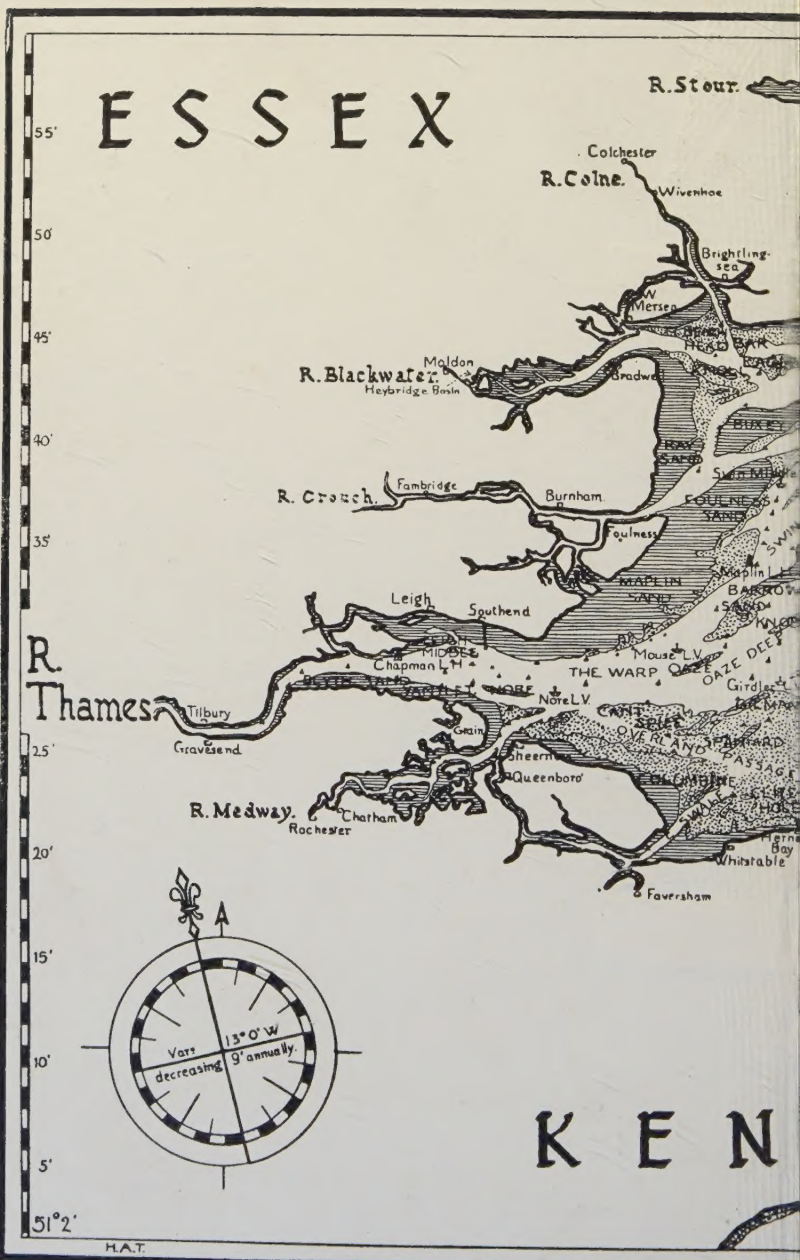
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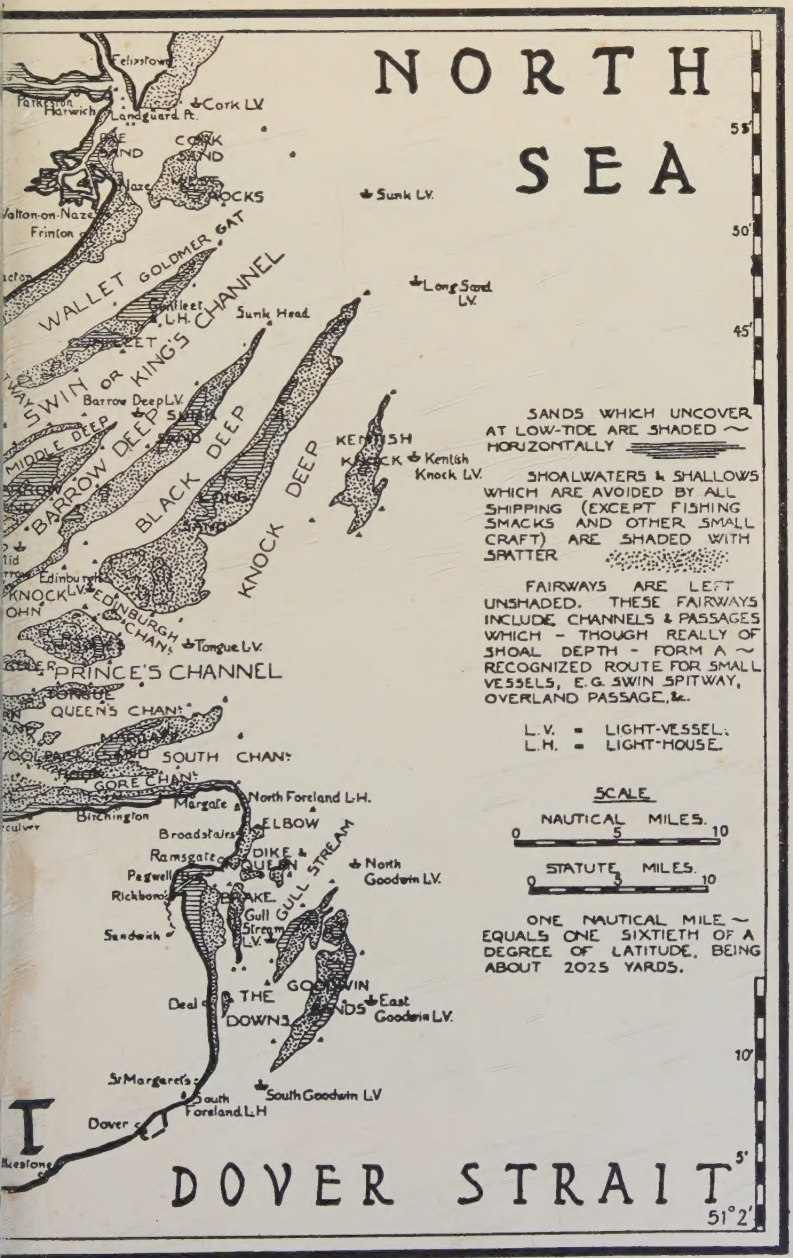

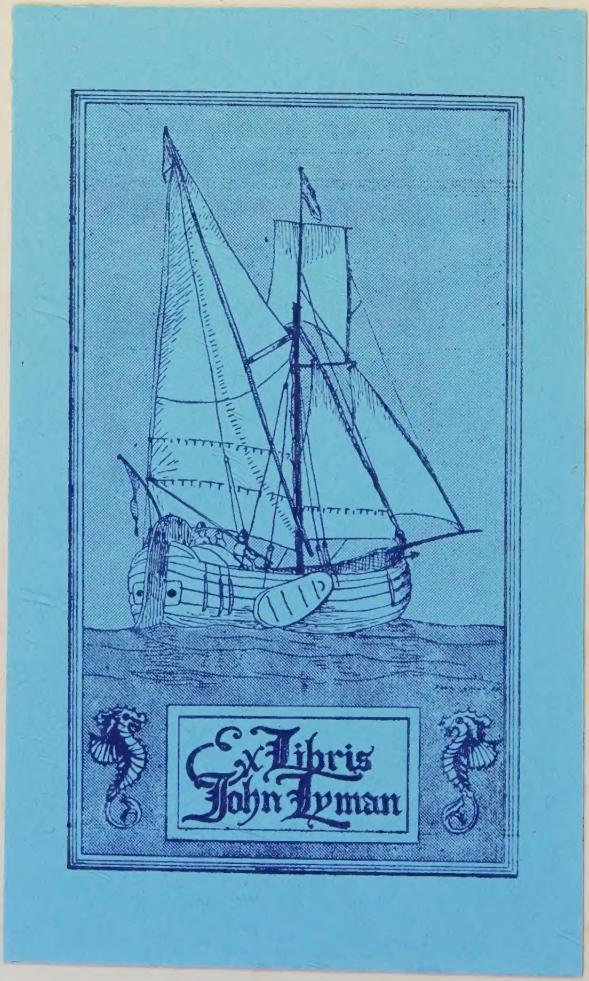
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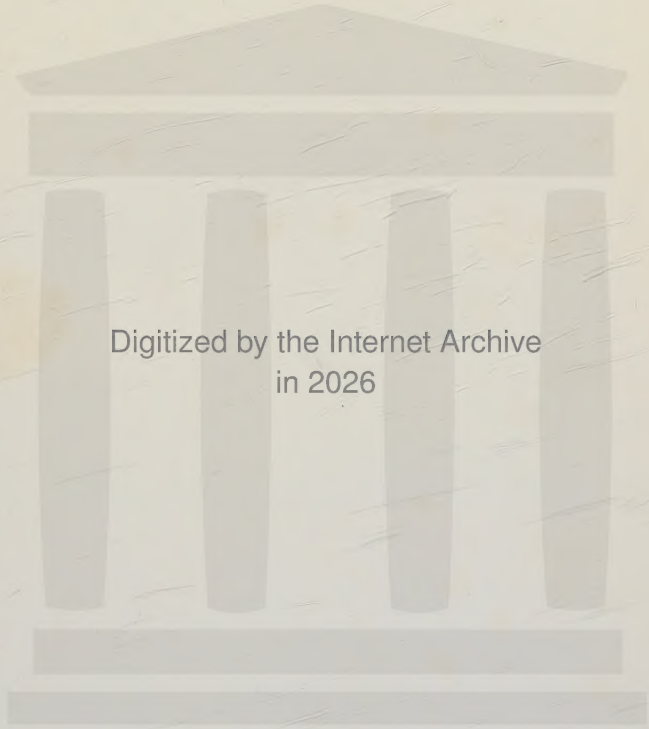

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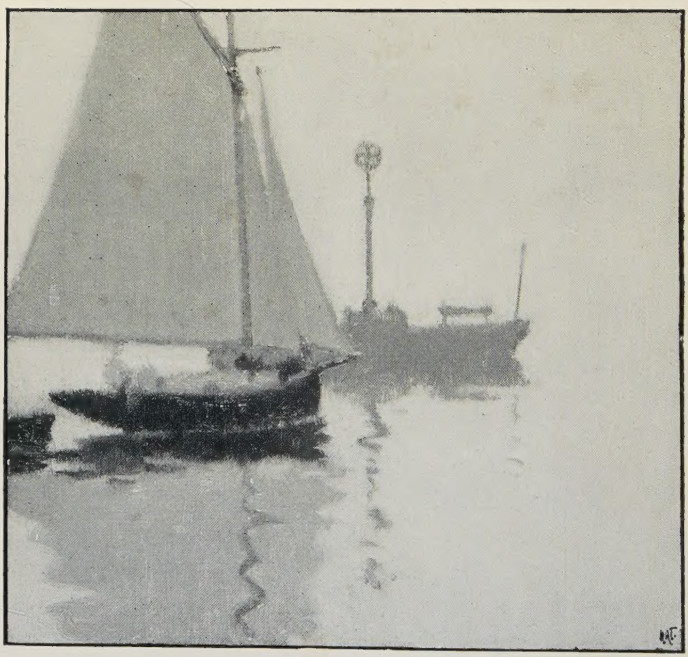

AT THE NORE—MIST LIFTING

SHOALWATER AND FAIRWAY

THE CASUAL EXPLORATIONS OF A SAILING MAN IN THE SHOAL SEAS AND TIDAL WATERS OF ESSEX AND KENT :: ::

BY H. ALKER TRIPP ('LEIGH HOE') ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR

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FOREWORD

THESE shoalwaters and fairways cover the immediate sea-approaches of London. To many persons their very existence is none the less unsuspected. The whole region is a place unthought of, unknown.

The triangle of sea between Essex and Kent is really one great wilderness of sands and banks, pierced only by narrow fairways. All these shoals, except at dead low water, are hidden by shallow sea. The coast is for that reason dangerous; it is reputed to be one of the most dangerous in the world. Shipwrecks without number, through all the ages, have occurred there.

The Goodwins, alone renowned, form a separate shoal-island.

Being within seventy miles of Charing Cross, this shoalwater region has its own claim to notice.

Apart from the Introduction, which is general in character, each chapter records some casual expedition of a seven-ton yacht.

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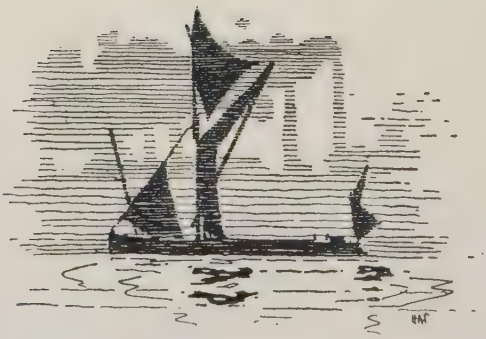

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SHOALWATER AND FAIRWAY

I

INTRODUCTORY

WHITE-JERSEYED, and with his broad back turned to me, my shipmate leaned negligently in the well of the yacht and scanned the horizon, as we made seaward from the Colne. Being longer-sighted of the two, I am generally first, and I had already found those two shoal-head buoys on the sea-line—the buoys for which we had both been searching.

"Spotted it yet? Found your buoy?" I said.

He turned a bronzed countenance upon me, grinning and triumphant.

"Yes, of course," he said, "both of 'em."

We had left behind us the congestion of Brightlingsea Creek, with its yacht-slips, its barges aground, and its crowded anchorage. The estuary was open about us. We had exchanged the bustle and cross-purposes of a constricted creek for suavity of long horizons. The yacht was slipping quietly through the blue water, with evening sunlight golden on her sails. And the sound of water that bubbled under her bows and dropped whitely astern was musical—a pleasant tune in our ears.

When turning to windward out of the Creek, we had sailed, board for board, with a great smack

which, under her heavy mainsail, was driving that bluff bulk of hers solidly through the water. A lather of white foam was breaking under her forefoot. As we both eased away our mainsheets, we found ourselves sailing in company. Sturdily-rigged and solid and toil-seared, the gaunt old smack sailed close beside the yacht.

" What d'you think of the weather ? "

Evening was golden, but I doubted its promise. At the same time, it was by way of friendliness rather than serious quest of wisdom that I called across to the helmsman of our consort and asked him about it.

" Dunno, I'm shore," came back the strong voice, deep-throated and voluminous. " That wind it flew out nor'-west, and I sez, ' That'll blow.' It didn't blow no more'n this. There you are. Dunno wot to make of it, quite."

Leaning on his tiller, he put the helm up a trifle, and the two ships separated a little more. The noise of the water breaking from our bows made it necessary to shout.

" Boun' fur ? " he queried.

" Dover."

" Dunno, I'm shore," he repeated, and pulled his cap more closely down on his ears. The white water broke away from the bows, and we each sent aft a long white wake, to mix and bicker in the blue water astern.

We were not bound far, and yet quite far enough, if responsively minded, to touch things that are often hidden and remote. The characteristic ele-

ment of salt-water sailing hereabouts is the navigation of shoalwaters. The shoal-riddled grey seaways possess a mystery and enticement which is all their own, and every fairway or creek is characteered and individual.

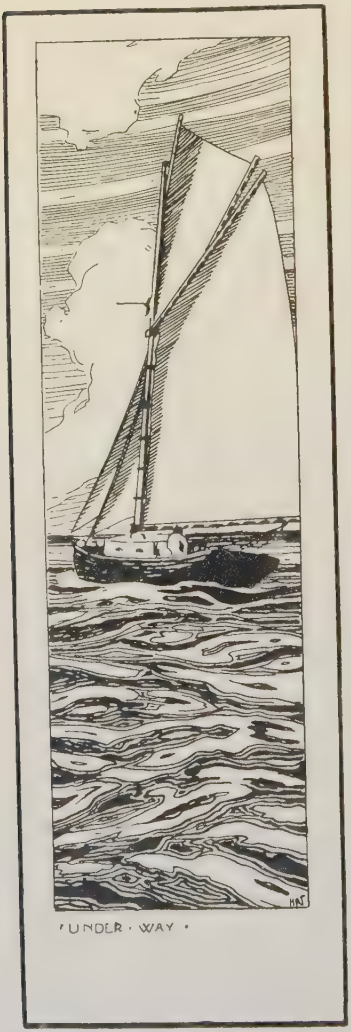
The yacht had hauled Colne Point abeam. With its shingle and wind-swept green, perioded by grey martello towers, the low coast-line turned away eastward and left us. We had opened the unbroken horizon, south-eastward and away; all was open sea with never a break in the wind-ruffled blueness of it.

This ruffled water was not as honest as it looked. On the face of things it was of equal virtue everywhere; actually it teemed with treacherous shoals which allow a depth of only a foot or two at low tide. Some of them even emerge and dry out.

"Slack off that lee-runner a little," I said, "it bites on the main just the least bit." The yacht was sailing on, briskly, southward.

Many people fancy that the sea-bottom is shaped conveniently like a saucer, deepening uniformly from shore. Needless to mention to those who have thought on these things, it is not. It often deepens awhile and then crops up again with disconcerting suddenness: as, for instance, upon a straight line from Folkestone to France, a spot is encountered about half-way across where the water is only nine feet deep at low tide. It is called the Varne Shoal; and a hundred similar instances could be quoted.

But the entrances to the Thames—between Harwich and the North Foreland—are more complexly



and more resolutely shoaled than average seas in general. They only declare themselves in their true colours for an hour perhaps at low water; and then the dangers which besiege the fairway channels are made naked. A dozen miles out at sea, a great vessel in the main shipways finds herself, for an hour or so, as in a broad ditch between banks of ribbed sea-sand. Then the tide flows, and all again is open sea.

Upon those big maps of our school-days, all the sea was painted alike one uniform and generous blue. But the yachtsman who sets sail from Brightlingsea, trusting to that blue-water theory of the school-room, will not long await his moment of disillusion.

"See that yacht, a

week come Sunday, up top the Bench H'd Shoal?"

As I was loitering beside the busy "hard" at one of these waterside places (with men moving to and fro, and boats coming and going about me) I turned to greet a smacksman of my acquaintance. Tanned and sea-booted he stood there; and if his deep voice betrayed any emotion it was not one of sorrow. I had missed the spectacle, and said so.

"I see him stand in too far on the ebb," he continued resonantly. "And I hollered. 'Tweren't no do; and I allow he hadn't ought to be out, same's that, bein' he know'd no better. No more'n a babe unborn."

"Much wind?" I asked.

"Hard breeze, same's this. As I sez, I hollered. But he up his hellum, and lay her straight at it—*put* her on."

"Any harm?"

"No, I doubt she didn't take much hurt. I see him cussin' an' swearin', and all his halliards snarled, and him runnin' about his deck an' shovin' an' all. Fast, she was, an' tide a-leavin' her. 'That ain't a mite of use a-pushin' an' a-shovin', she's fast,' I sez, 'you gotter wait; I doubt she don't fleet afore midnight.

"I see old Bill he put a hand aboard him" (the great voice still reverberated). "I sez to my mate, 'That'll rain. Wind a-takin' off: she on't take no hurt.' That boat, I knowed her, built Maldon-way; faithfully built she wer'. Any blessed old

tore-out, he'd a busted her, proper. But she came off, happen midnight, Bill he said."

Whether or no a ship will escape unscathed after she has "piled herself up" on a shoal is a matter which depends entirely upon the dispensations of fortune and of the weather. On the soft mud in the estuaries she will take no harm in any event unless her anchors drag and she encounters some hard obstruction; but upon the hard sandbanks outside the case is wholly different. The sand-surface is as unyielding as iron. The stranded ship sits down on it, and the tide leaves her. If, when the flood tide returns, the weather is calm, she will float gently, without a scratch. If, on the other hand, a real storm has sprung up during the interval, the waves—as soon as they reach her—will pound, pound, pound her against that iron sand, and probably knock her to pieces. That process is enacted time after time, ship after ship, on these sands as on Goodwins.

The weather was not rough when the great sailing ship *Indian Chief* ran aground on the Long Sand one dark night in 1881. But, as the flood made, the east wind was gradually sweeping up into a gale. The ship broke her back and became a total wreck. The mainmast and mizenmast went by the board in the breakers that roared upon her. The rescue by the Ramsgate life-boat, in that destructive shoal-sea, of survivors lashed to the foremast was an exploit of superlative, even impudent, bravery. It was a feat outstanding, even in life-boat annals.

The great wilderness of sands and banks, pierced only by narrow fairways, is reputed to have rendered this corner of coast one of the most dangerous coasts in the world. If an imaginary line be drawn from the North Foreland in Kent to Orfordness in Suffolk, the whole of the sea thus enclosed is shoal and sandbank, and its only deep-water channels are those kept open by the scour of the tide in and out of the rivers. All the rest is treacherous shoalwater, a death-trap for unwary ships. These sands teem with the ribs of them.

Following the tidal currents that set in and out of the Thames, the sandbanks run out like long fingers north-eastward from the Nore—the Barrow Sand, Sunk Sand, Long Sand and so on—and the narrow fairways make landward between them. The great channels lead into the Thames, while minor fairways give access to Crouch, Colne and Blackwater.

This then is that shoal-riddled grey seaway of ours, over the grey distances of which the sea-borne traffic of the ancient London has searched its careful way for centuries. Steering in early mediæval days only by lead and compass, and by the position of recognized objects ashore, the shipmen had a difficult task. Local pilotage was essential as ships increased in size and the pilots naturally made no haste to dissipate their own mysteries; buoyage and erection of seamarks achieved no substantial progress until the beginning of the seventeenth century, although isolated beacons had been in existence for a couple of hundred years

before that. Headway has since been made apace. The whole matter is now in the hands of Trinity House, and the channels are buoyed and beaconed and lighted with the precision of a railway system.

A little world in itself, this network of shoalwater and fairway has its own habits and traditions. Not all the channels are equally used, nor all the shoals given an equal berth. There is a patch of sand on the Oaze, for instance, seven miles off shore, where it is possible to stand dryshod at low water; if a yacht let go her anchor near that spot the whole heavy traffic in and out of the Thames would converge upon her within a mile of her on either side. But if she anchored in mid fairway of the Black Deep, a broad and unobstructed channel from the Thames to the sea, perfectly adapted for shipping, not a vessel would come nigh her. Except perhaps for some benighted sludge vessel, she would be left severely alone.

The main fairways for London are as direct and populated as London streets. Over the grey fretful sea-water, patterned with foam (that character of sea-face which is so familiar here), the position of the Barrow Deep is at once established by the line of steamer traffic. Dark hulls forging resolutely, and distant funnel and blur of horizon smoke trace the fairway north-eastward and south-westward. Through the Swin Channel is the coastwise traffic of sailing barges, and traffic also of the smaller steam-tramps, grubby-hulled and deep-laden. Through the Prince's and the Edinburgh Channels, there comes great traffic from the Downs and

Straits of Dover, wind-jammer or tramp or towering ocean-liner all in crowding profusion. Meanwhile the Middle Deep, Black Deep, Knock Deep and Queen's Channel lie day-long forsaken and silent.

Equally at night, the traffic is alive on the main routes, and the lights are alive also. It is a wonder-world then. Over the dark seascape, lights that are white and coloured will glimpse fitfully and occult and flick with bewildering frequency and confusion. Lightship and lighted buoy send their flash and glitter abroad from every point on the horizon, and the shipping, always astir, adds its lights of white, green and red that move through

the general galaxy. The great ships pass by otherwise unseen. There is only the thud-thud of heavy propellers, the solid wash of the bow-wave from thrust of the bows, and perhaps the deep booming note of a distant fog-horn. The vast hull may be visible for a moment as a dark blur in the darkness, but only so, and it is gone.

Successors of generations of British shipmen, these navigators follow the old sea-tracks of full-canvased three-decker and Elizabethan carrack. Ships like ships from dreamland were before them on these grey heaving fairways. Roaring down wind, under bannered sails, was the argosy becarved and begilt; she foamed away London-ward, her long streamers gay in the wind. Overhung with scarlet cloth, her waist defended by painted shields a-row, the King's ship of the Middle Ages dropped seaward on the ebb. Long galleys, with pulse of oars embanked, have slashed up a lather of white foam as they steered proudly in. Their blasts of clarions have sounded more and more faintly on the wind as they made at sundown towards the ancient river. It has all gone now; the grey waters, that swing into the tideways and out, toss and buffet their flotsam still; gay carrack or stately liner, it is all one to them. The grey shoalwaters remain, indifferent, unchanged.

Primitive still, but still supremely effective, is some of the smaller shipping. The Thames barge is no modern contrivance, but she is still pre-eminent. Dependent on sail only, she is the largest sailing-vessel in the world which is regularly handled in all weathers by two men only. In and

OCEAN FREIGHTER OUTWARD BOUND

out of these channels she threads her expert course, laden with grain perhaps or cement, and then again up some creek or inlet miles landward she searches her way to a farm-wharf among the fields. She loads. When she makes again seaward, she goes as a "stackie," having a haystack on deck, and the mate abaft of it at the steering-wheel steers blindly, his outlook nothing but hay. He is obedient to the shouts of the skipper, who straddles the hayrick. All among the delicate modern refinements of turbine and wireless of other vessels, the whole affair seems grotesquely primitive—occurring as it so often does upon London River itself; but it maintains a justification strictly up-to-date, for, in open competition, *it pays*.

Primitive also in the main are the fishing-vessels. Cutter-rigged, they fish from Brightlingsea, deep-sea. Off-shore and inshore they trawl from Harwich and Mersea. Whitstable and the Colne have their oyster-beds and the Leigh bawleys trawl for shrimps. The brown-sailed vessels lie away gracefully from the wind as they string out in little bevies headed toward their "grounds," the water foams and tumbles from the sturdy forefoot. Then, head-sails aback, they are hove-to, and the trawls and dredges are soon over the gunwale. "Good fish here, water same's this," an old fisherman serving on a large yacht once confided to me half regretfully as we stood on the shining deck. "So be we'd got a trawl, soon flop 'im over, *we* would." Fishing instinct was in the blood, generations old.

There are aversions, traditional also, as I had

cause to remember when—ashore one day at Leigh—I met a fisherman whom I knew. "Trawling yesterday?" I asked him.

"Yes, yes. Down the Swin," he said testily for him, and surly-voiced. "That'll blow," he added without relevance, and he eyed the clouded horizon, as he began again to fill his pipe.

It was sheer clumsiness on my part to have missed so plain a hint.

"Down the Swin? Any wrecks there?" I asked with blundering facetiousness, for the wrecks are notorious as they are hated. It was the last thing that I ought to have said.

"Talk to me of wrecks," he growled. He doubled his fist and banged the wooden rail. "Wrecks? I doubt there ain't much else. Proper good trole, noo net. Robb'ry, *I* call it. There you are."

The wrecks are strewn very thickly in these waters, and the shrimps, having a particular fancy for wrecks, swarm in their neighbourhood. If, however, the trawl catches the wrecks instead of the shrimps, it is apt to stay there. The subject—as sufficiently indicated already—is at such times a delicate one for conversation.

The wrecks cumber the sea-bottom. Deep in the Swin and about the sands the wrecks are there. But before each one of them found her last berth among seaweed and the darting fishes, there had been grim happenings above. In mediæval times and even later, longshoremen really believed the old saw,

> "Save a stranger from the sea
> And he'll turn your enemie,"

and certain it is that they regarded wrecks as all men's prey. Undeterred by heavy seas, they put themselves aboard to plunder. They fought one another like wolves, even all amid the thunder of the surf. In time of Edward III, men from Harwich dispossessed Yarmouth men of a fat prize, a wreck which they were looting, and Yarmouth men seriously threatened to come and burn Harwich town as reprisal.

OLD SHIPWAYS.

Stark crime at sea has been mitigated by a more Christian code of morals, and life is less often cast away by reason of the gallant life-boat.

"Happen midnight it were, signal come from the Barrow Light-Vessel," said some sturdy fellow at Clacton in answer to my question. "Wind, sou'-westerly. That had come on to blow a strong hard wind. Gale, midnight."

He was disinclined to dwell upon the subject and only puffed meditatively at his pipe until I recalled his mind to the wreck by a further question or two.

"Yes, yes. I don't want you should think us chaps don't know our business. But I tell you truth—*we couldn't find 'em.* Wind that rough

you wouldn't believe, and waves all atop of us. Them pore chaps, they got it proper. Up top West Sunk Sands; Gov'ment tug, eighteen hands."

He punctuated his narrative repeatedly with strong puffs of blue tobacco-smoke, and the pauses had the effect of perioding his sentences.

"Waves, higher'n her, breakin' on the Sands, and every blessed one went right over her. Smothered her, fair. Not near her, we couldn't get. That sea laid into us, crool. 'Doubt,' I sez, 'we don't never fetch nigh of her.' Happen a great sea come duntin' an' hollerin' over, an' you *looked*" (and he paused dramatically and turned full upon me)—"*looked* to see was she still there, not broke up."

With skilful seamanship, the coxswain was at last able to manœuvre the life-boat under the bow of the vessel, and the shipwrecked men jumped from the rigging. It was one of the roughest experiences the life-boat men had ever suffered; oilskins were useless—every man was drenched to the skin the whole time.

A day or two later, all will be calm—with a blue sea that stretches to smooth horizons.

Here then, in calm or storm, within a radius of fifty to a hundred miles of St. Paul's, is our little universe of shoalwater and fairway. After a day of common work in town, the yachtsman can find himself at evening among the sounds of the water and cry of the sea-gulls, islanded in absolute aloneness, in all this liberal breadth, with the clear arch of sky and the long horizons. Spirited from the

grim town, he can find himself on some summer midnight sailing on the dark open sea, or anchored down a creek, dimly secluded, where silence is absolute save for the clutter of the tide round his cable and lonely call of the night-birds.

Somewhere on the cabin shelves lay a couple of books which describe wanderings of large yachts, far afield. For our present venture, "leave of absence" was limited. The old proverb about "cutting your coat according to your cloth" is, like most proverbs, a concentrated line of wisdom immemorial. In a sentence it embodies an argument which is conclusive; and it suggests also one perfectly sound reason why the shoalwaters of Essex and Kent form the scope of enterprise at the moment.

I do not grumble in the least, nor even do I feel that here essentially is the humbler province. Not needing to search the seven seas for romance and miracle, the stay-at-home wanderer can discover the same qualities, enough and to spare, in these home shoalwaters of ours. When Francis Thompson said that

> "The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
> Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors,"

he was saying one of those things which, though obviously true, are apt to pass unrecognized until poets say them. There are strange movings and miraculous happenings, even in twilight of the Thames.

II

NIGHT ON THE GREAT SHIPWAYS

"GYBE-OH. Come on, are you ready?"

We stirred our lazy limbs, and hauled in the mainsheet of the yacht, hand over hand. The sunlit sail went over with a thud, and the sheet ran out through the blocks again. And again we settled down to our indolent appreciation of this calm seascape in the quiet evening light.

Sailing conditions were fine-weather, a genial change after some of the rough work of late weeks.

"Quite a wonder to be able to sit on deck and have a dry deck to sit on," my companion reflected. But he did not really suit the action to the word. He was not sitting at all; he was prostrate, full-length. With a bright red cushion behind him, he blinked at the low sunshine—a Sybarite, luxuriously idle.

"Rather different from when we were last here. But she was taking it over green then! Lee rail right under."

"Comes of people being too confoundedly lazy to reef." He lay back and watched his cigarette smoke blow away, quite proud of the amount which he was able to contain and deliver. One would

have said, from the posture of him, that he was hardly the person to rebuke laziness. Almost, in his present attitude, it seemed like Satan rebuking sin.

Brightlingsea Creek and the Colne had faded into the past. It was just beyond the Bar and Bench Head Buoys that we had gybed ship. A mile and a half off-shore, though they mark the twin shoal-heads, these buoys do not show "all clear." It is only an elbow-turn in the deep-water channel, and the passage is still beset by shoal. Evening would soon be waning into night, and we should go on twisting heedfully, this way and that, during the whole of the dark hours.

One shoal was under our lee, and another to weather; we were holding course for a swatchway between two more of them. Yet the whole face of the water looked complacent and smiling. There was not a hint of it. We were laying course for the Swin Spitway, having no occasion for the Ray-sand Channel.

"That ain't no manner o' good, a-fidgitin' same's that. You got the tide a-hebbin through the San's, an' young flood it come a-meetin' you there, an' all a-streamin' up along, up Lunnon River way. Rays'n ain't in it, boun' suthard. Course, a-cotchellin', Burnham River an' that, that's diff'rent."

The sturdy eloquence of the bargemaster who, standing beside his barge at the hythe, had so expressed himself was thoroughly orthodox. Through one channel the tides are straightforward, through the other they are arbitrary. Hence the preference.

The "cotchellin' an' that" merely means going in somewhere, half laden, to complete cargo.

Smoothly over the smooth blue water, the yacht slid on, her course almost due easterly.

"Wallet Spitway. What time?"

The buoy was rocking, in a quiet and dignified manner, some distance away, seen through the port shrouds. The wrist-watch said seven. We gybed ship again, and laid course for the Swin Spitway Buoy, as yet invisible, which marks the other end of the swatchway.

"Don't care much for the look of the weather. We're not going to keep the fine slant."

A grey duskiness about us suggested thunder somewhere in the offing; it would not be surprising if we blundered into a thunderstorm during the night. "Tempest" is what they call it in Essex; "tempest" is the Essex name for a thunderstorm, be it even without a breath or stirring of the wind.

The haze was killing the sun, and the horizons were murky. The wind, our willing little breeze, was also taking off. It was a disappointment—after a day of sunshine—to see the weather degenerating. The sun had first of all become a watery-yellow ball, struggling to shine through a general murkiness that had overspread the sky, and finally it relinquished the contest altogether and disappeared. Night seemed coming on an hour before its time.

In this water, greyer about us now, the waves that lifted and welled had become less eager. The heave of the seaway was lethargic, and lacked the old abounding buoyancy. But the yacht still

held on, and the washing sound of water that broke wash-wash-washing from her bows was still musical.

"Clang, clang, clang," then a pause; and "clang" again. The sound welled, dimly metallic, over the long grey sea-face. It was the Swin Spitway Bell-buoy, rocking and ringing as the waves lifted it and toppled it sideways and then jolted it up again. "Clan-clang, clang." We could see the hammers working, or rather one of them, for we both decided that only one was doing all the work. A lazy cormorant sat on top of the buoy and flapped off sulkily as we approached.

"This wind hasn't done us very proud. It looks like dropping altogether now."

If the tide had met us through the Spitway, with the wind so light, we should have failed to make the Swin Channel at all. We had cut our margin pretty fine, but we were safe now. We were in the main tide-ways.

We intended to stand straight across the old shipway of the King's Channel into the Barrow Deep—the modern steamship way. The Barrow Sand must be given a good berth to northward, lest the flood tide set us sagging southward on to the shoal. The Heaps Buoy at least must be made.

As the yacht clove her slow way eastward through a smooth sea, green-grey, the bubbles spread astern of her, lightly patterned over the light heave of the waves. We were watching the steamers that passed distantly along the Barrow Deep, and the long smoke trails on the horizon. Outward-bound, these ships had carried the ebb down the Thames; London-bound, they would now pick up the young flood and carry their tide with them up to the Docks. They were distant grey ships on the horizon. And the familiar blur, the faint brownness of drifted smoke, hung dimly over the Fairway.

"The tide's got us already."

So it had. The tide was setting us sideways all the time.

The sky had become expressionless, and darkness was falling. The gloom grew more pronounced, but the wind fell lighter. While we reached out,

we had been still watching the coastwise traffic, but cloud had now expunged it. A flat dullness settled; it closed in upon us.

"Thunder somewhere, to a certainty," I said; "look at the wind."

The wind had run round right ahead and now came in little cat's-paws, scuffling over the surface of the waves.

"We shan't make the Heaps," I added, "and this rain is a nuisance; you can't see the blessed compass with the glass all clouded over."

If the tone was peevish, it only indicated the slight unspoken tension of mind, the little tiptoe tingle of uncertainty, while one waited for the weather to show its hand. The land had vanished some time ago in the dark blur of haze; the shipping was now also lost, and we were solitary. Grey light on the grey sea was deader; day was failing.

The little scurry passed; the rain had stopped, but the wind had done the same—it had gone completely. It had gone, and had taken with it our chances of making the Barrow Deep; we should not round the No. 3 Buoy to-night. The yacht must just drift with the tide towards the Swin Middle Lightship.

We had tossed a penny, and I had called "Tails." As the coin, on inspection, disclosed the face of the gracious sovereign, I had evidently lost. And that was the reason why I was now standing, with my head emerging from the fore-hatch, and was filling, polishing up and generally setting in order,

the green and red side-lights. It is a dirty job. But they were soon in their brackets on the shrouds, and I was looking with approval at their coloured eyes in the gloom, while I tried to remove that taint of paraffin from my fingers. Cotton-waste unlimited can barely suffice. The hatch was battened down, and I had returned to the cockpit.

It was night. A night of low cloud lay heavily about us; a sullen murk possessed the seaways. But that dull twilight and early night seemed somehow redolent of the very spirit of these waters. Nothing had been visible on the wide grey seascape, until now a few occulting and flashing lights began to stab the gloom. Yet on all sides we were encompassed by the unseen shoals, upon which a boat even of our own light draught would ground at this state of the tide. And over all there was the smooth deceptive surface of uniform grey sea. The dead expanse of shoalwater possessed a character, a mystery, inalienably its own.

"It begins to look like anchoring when the tide turns. We're doing nothing but drift. Look."

A fragment of white wood was tossed overboard, and a beam of lamp-light turned on it. We were unable to leave it behind. It lay sluggishly beside us on the heaving grey water.

"Never mind. We're drawing eastward of the Swin Middle, and there's four hours flood yet. Lots of time for things to happen."

There is a depression in the Barrow Sand between the Swin Middle and the Maplin Lights which would enable us to cross the shoal. We hoped yet

to be able to slip over it into the Barrow Deep. If we succeeded, we should be on the way to making the Girdler Lightship instead of the Mouse; and, if a breeze sprang up, we should make the Edinburgh Channel instead.

The red light of the Maplin pile-lighthouse had been in view for some time. The present lighthouse is more or less in the position of the old Shoe Beacon, perhaps the oldest seamark of these waters. It is known to have existed in 1542, and was probably there a hundred years before that.

The murk was clearing a little now, for the recurring green flash of the Mouse Lightship was also in sight. That group-flashing white light of the Mid Barrow Lightship (three every twenty seconds) had also been located. We were taking cross-bearings from time to time and marking down our position on the chart with some care, in order to jump off accurately for the hole in the Barrow Sand if opportunity offered.

It was now past ten o'clock, and we were more than abreast of the Swin Middle. The whole East and West Swin, not to speak of the Middle Deep, seemed to have been reserved for us. There was not a ship about. We again marked off our position on the chart and leaned comfortably in the cockpit, looking round at the vital snap of the lights on the dead background of the dark sea and sky, and waited.

Then, as one again turned into the warm little cabin, and plotted out the position under the cabin lamp, what contrast it was, the concentrated homeliness of this neat little cabin, red-cushioned and

warmly-lighted, to the vague space and mystery of the darkness overhead and all about us. There was a strangeness in the very quiet of the dull gloom.

Not a sound was audible in these populated waters; the shipping as well as the sea itself seemed to have fallen asleep. Apart from the horizon fairway-lights, nothing could be seen save the long face of dark grey water which heaved sluggishly with a stagnant sense in its very movement. The yacht seemed stock-still. Then out of the greyness and night some unlighted buoy would loom gradually and harden into shape, and would seem to drift with a sliding motion rapidly past the yacht—a bicker of tide about it. Actually the whole face of the waters, yacht and all, was moving

southward, and the buoy was the one thing stationary in the whole night seascape.

"We've lost our second chance of the Barrow now. We shan't make the opening."

It seemed true enough; midnight had come, with darkness that was still dead and stagnant, and only two hours of tide remained in hand. Our chances of seeing the North Foreland in the morning were degenerating. The Mid Barrow had begun to bear east-by-south and we were drawing down toward the occulting red light of the Maplin, now brilliant.

"Listen."

We almost held our breath, both of us, in the intensity of attention. It was useless to strain one's eyes upon the dark; the dark was impenetrable. Hearing would alone be of any value. There was no doubt about the sound, it was a familiar one, a sound more like the distant noise of rushing water than anything else. From a long way off it welled, a long, long way with a level note across the flat grey distance. It seemed to hang there interminably, and the yacht hovered impotent, inert, waiting in the darkness. Yet there was no doubt of the sound. It was wind.

And how would it take us? From what quarter would it spring? Under thundery conditions, which had evidently prevailed, it might leap from the dark on us with staggering weight and all at once.

Slap down upon us it came, in a solid little gust; the sheets tautened, the dark sails filled. A glimmer

of foam spread into the darkness on each side and astern. She was off.

And, surely, surely—yes. It was a fair wind! The yacht had been twisted about, as the hand on the helm had tried to jockey for position with the assailing wind, and her course had now to be straightened out, and fresh bearings taken. The wind was N.N.W., and the mainsail was sheeted home for the yacht to reach back over the tide, and open out the swatchway. Off went the main-sheet again, and she was laid a little to the north of the lightship, and then dead on it. The water was breaking into fresh waves, and she was sailing fast; but one or two soundings with the lead-line verified her position. All was well.

Here and there were the lights of shipping now, up and down the Barrow Deep. A large steamer, with rows of portholes alight, crossed our track, some distance ahead; and we could hear the loud thud-thud-thud of her propeller as she held her steady course for the Thames. A smaller steamer, with the red port light bright toward us, passed her, outward-bound. Everything was alive again now. One or other of us hoisted himself from the cockpit, and catching hold of the runner, passed himself along to the shrouds, and back the other side; he had been to see that our side-lights were burning clearly, before we crossed the regular track of shipping in the Barrow Deep. We were not carrying a fixed stern-light, but were availing ourselves of the concession allowed to small vessels. We had a white light handy to show to any vessel that

THE BARROW DEEP. RAISED QUARTER DECK
COASTER CROSSING THE MOONTRACK

might be following or might want to locate our position.

We were in the lines of traffic now. The ceaseless merchant shipping is up and down these waters. No longer representing the enterprise of individual merchant-adventurers, as did the tall carracks of Tudor days, this modern shipping is part of one world-wide machinery of distribution and supply. The ship that passed us just now, the dark hull that gloomed athwart us, the hull immersed with precision to the load-line, trimmed slightly by the stern, a great shelter-decker with a black cloud of smoke dimly above her in the night, she was only an item in the wide inventory. Other items, mechanical all, are at either end of her voyage. The great docks of London are behind her, with their swing-bridges and gate-machinery, their travelling cranes, their coal-tips, capstans, lifts, iron-lattice towers, and all the rest of it. And at Hull or Hamburg will be the docks and wharves again, with more cranes and coal-tips and capstans; the railway sidings will be there and trucks waiting to take the cargo far inland, and the graving-dock will be ready for the ship, if wanted. Another and another ship went by and faded into the night.

Faintly by contrast with the brilliant flashes of the Mid Barrow, which was now right over the bow, the quick stab of light from the Edinburgh Channel Light Vessel, about four miles further on, was visible. It would be necessary to cross the Knock John, and tail of the Sunk Sand, with a least depth of four feet; but the tide was up, and nothing

mattered. We carried straight on, bowling merrily along with the brisk breeze.

To north-eastward of us ran out, under water and away into distance, the long lines of the Sunk and Long Sands, with their history of wrecks and wreckers. It was here, often enough, that ill-starred vessels of the Middle Ages, once aground, were mercilessly looted, and their shipmen done to death; and through all the years vessels have still come here to their doom on sands hidden and treacherous. It was on the Long Sand that the wreck, already mentioned, of the sailing ship *Indian Chief* happened. It was forty years ago, but part of the wreck is still there.

There was a line of silver glitter on the water over the bows, bright for a moment and then blotted into the night. This wind was clearing the clouds, and the waning half-moon, now risen, had sent a shaft of light through a break in them down on the sea. Everything was tuning up into a new life; the moon then opened, clear of cloud, the wind was singing, and the sea was quick and musical. The time was now about one o'clock in the morning. A contrast, this, to the torpid silence and gloom of an hour or so ago.

Had that break of moonlight glittered seaward of us an hour earlier, it would have been possible to identify some of the Barrow Deep shipping. The great hulls were only blurs in the darkness. Dark blurs they might also be, even under the moonlight, save for one brief magical moment when they cross the moon-track of silver. Sil-

houetted for an instant, every line is declared—well-decker or three-islander, with squat funnel, stumpy steel masts and uncouth derricks. North-bound in light ballast, one of them would be a collier for the Tyneside; outward-bound in general cargo, others would be laying course for Holland or Denmark. And south-bound, with a heavy list and a high deck-cargo, the timber-ship would be making London from Scandinavia.

The Edinburgh Light Vessel was soon abeam, and we were entering the Fairway between the Long Sand and the Shingles. The wind was N.W. and dead aft, and we went somewhat in dread of an accidental gybe in the dark. Buoys ahead and to the south of us were blinking and flickering, with red and white gleams; steamers came thrashing this way and that with their clear red and green eyes, and their bright white steaming-lights. Onward we tumbled with this strong following breeze which was already heaping up the characteristic steep waves of these waters; we lifted and sank with that swelling movement of a ship running before the wind. The dinghy was tugging at the two stout painters which secured her to our stern, but she was not likely to give us any trouble—as yet, at all events. And so we swung on through the night.

Forging out astern of us was a bluffed-bowed ocean freighter; she seemed to tower in the night as she bore down on our stern, and we could hear the heavy rustle of the wave rolled back by her bows. Not really a great ship perhaps in contrast

with the liners, she yet looked a formidable object astern of the yacht. A one-funnelled deeply-loaded ship, she was fresh from the Dockside. When, while her derricks were busy, she swallowed a trifle of another fifty tons or so of cargo into those great holds of hers, it only sank her an inch deeper in the water towards her load-line. Six hundred tons more would begin to be noticeable, for that weight would further sink her as much as the length of a penny ruler—just one foot. She was outward-bound. The docks, far astern of her in London, would still be clattering and busy now with their noise of derricks and grabs and capstans, there would still be profusion of electric lights among the sheds and warehouses. The hydraulic and electric travelling cranes and coal-tips

would be eternally restless. The whole night would be astir with it, the grinding, the clanging and clatter. She had exchanged it all, with one tide's change, for the silence and salt-breezes of the wide night seaway. She pushed ahead of us, outward-bound.

The liners and traders, following the tracks of the old China clippers or the West-Indian fruiters, converge here from China and India and Australia; past the old Tongue Lightship the great ships push Thames-ward with stately indifference from America and the Cape. The P. and O. outward-bound passes the Atlantic transport about to dock at Tilbury; the great grey tanker passes the grain-vessel, and among them all is the dirty British coaster, perhaps with her cargo of "cheap tin trays."

But consideration of cargoes opens up a wide chapter, rather less ornamental perhaps; I remember one or two such cargoes myself.

"Nice little passage for you," said the old Chips of a cargo-steamer (in-bound from Holland), as he leaned beside me on the bulwarks. "Nice little passage for you, comfable list to starboard, an' ship steady as a church." Then his benign smile puckered into a grin. "Only that there cheese, it do . . ." And he delicately held his nose. "Tell you wot," and the last few words dropped to an emphatic whisper, "*it smell like a corp.*"

The cargo below hatches was cheese and sheep's carcases, and both were manifest, even to the unobservant—but mostly the former.

We had not yet identified the Tongue Light

Vessel, with its double flash, among the web of coloured stars over the bow, and were holding course by compass. We were at the same time keeping a bright look-out to the southward for the North Foreland. As soon as its light had ceased to be obscured from us, and we had entered its red sector, we could slide down the edge of it, clear of the Margate Sand and all dangers until the Longnose Ledge at the Foreland itself.

"Surely there's light above the horizon to the north-east?"

There was a watery blue tinge, lighter than the full blue-grey of the moonlit sky; and it was the first glimpse of dawn. Within half an hour there was a strong line of red, low down along the eastern sea-line, and the sky above it was paling into a colder blue. The Tongue Light Vessel, clearly identified for some time now, was nearly abeam, about two miles distant, and the North Foreland light (brought clear of the Margate Sand, and therefore visible) hung like a red star above the southern horizon, about nine or ten miles away. The yacht was standing away southward for the Foreland, and had thus brought those steep waves on to her quarter and beam. She took on a heavy roll at once. If the breeze increased it would be necessary to reef; but—with her wind as free as this—she could carry on easily yet.

That old North Foreland light is one of the oldest in England, having been first installed—a primitive affair then—in 1683. It was rebuilt in 1790, and again in 1880.

DAWN AT SEA

My shipmate gave a prodigious yawn, and screwed up his eyes. The dawn had made him dead sleepy.

"All clear now," I said; "turn in for a nap. Why not? Relieve me later."

He did. He went below, rolled up in the blankets fully dressed, and was asleep in one minute.

The sea was a heavy cold leaden-blue in the dawn, and lumpy. Wave after wave furrowed with wind came gathering up, foam-crested, on the quarter, rolled the yacht sharply until her boom hit the water with a *slap*, lifted her up, and dropped her again on the windward roll with the water running out off the boom and out from the foot and clew of the wetted mainsail in a little rivulet. *Slap* went the boom on the next wave, and then up into the sky again. And so she rolled her way onward. But there was no vice in the waves, they were quite friendly.

The N.E. Spit, flashing more faintly under the dawn, was soon abeam, and the North Foreland light itself was growing a deader red as the light increased. The sky was for the most part clear, but a few contorted fragments of dark cloud gave it an unsettled look. Under the lee of the Margate Sand, the shelter of the shoal was definitely noticeable; the sea became lumpier again when the line of it was cleared, and on went the yacht, riding with beautiful cleanness and confidence over the cross-seas.

She seemed native to the work, and the conditions were inspiring, with the glamour of dawn and the fresh cold sea; but I was not anxious to have my

rather stiff limbs jolted like this for longer than necessary, for the "bring up" at the end of each roll was sharp. And I was inclined to ache. On the last tour of inspection, it was found that both the side-lights had gone out with the jolting (a wretched vice to which side-lights are prone), but as dawn was showing at the time they were not re-lighted, although in strictness they ought to have been. In order to cut the jolting short, it would be desirable to stand in close to the Foreland, which would give shelter at once. I had been trusting to memory to make my course inside the Goodwins, as it is quite straightforward, but I was suddenly seized with doubt as to whether there were any shallow patch on the Broadstairs Knoll, which ought to be given a berth. I was shaping course to pass inshore of the buoy. I had to lash the tiller, and it showed how much tiller work there had been, for she was hard to satisfy. The slightest error one way or the other would have sent her in a moment either up into the wind or off to a gybe. But I hit the spot before long, and dived below and purloined the chart without disturbing the sleeper. After juggling with chart and tiller for a minute or two, I found out what I really knew already. As I had known perfectly well all the time, there was ample depth over the shoal; and the chart might have been left, warm and dry, in the cabin.

Personally, I was not particularly warm just now. Dawn was chill. The Kent coast cliffs had none of that creamy sunlit white which is their summer charm and virtue; they stood up boldly, blue-grey,

over the leaden-blue water, bitter chill in colour as they awaited the dawn.

Even here, in these much-frequented waters, there was hardly a vessel in sight now. The space and freedom were immense. The North Foreland light was still visible, but it had become a dull point of red, no longer the one sharp flick of vitality on the deadness of the landfall. The lighthouse itself was plainly in sight, and the houses that now cluster all along the Foreland. The whole of it lay solitary and deserted. The seascape had a certain austerity of cold beauty which was very impressive. And there was a great loneliness.

This shore and cliff-line, which, seen from the sea in high summer, are so crowded and busy, were asleep. The lighthouse was abeam at 4.30; we had left the red sector now, and the light which occulted every half-minute was white. Broadstairs Bay was opening itself out a few minutes later, and we were scudding southward in the smoother water under the shelter of the Foreland cliffs. We had beaten the sun to the North Foreland; we had reached the coast of Kent before sunrise.

III

INSHORE OF THE GOODWINS

THERE were sounds from the cabin as of one who stretches his limbs mightily, and delivers himself of one monumental yawn. The figure in the bunk was recumbent no longer.

"Where are we? How far have we got?"

He was out in the cockpit beside me, and was telling the silent elements what he thought of the temperature outside. He convinced himself of the justice of his comments by a genuine shudder—it was much too effective to have been a sham. That dawn-chill went to the marrow, for the sun was not yet up.

Broadstairs, which invades the North Foreland with disfigurement of houses, lay abeam. Jetty, beach, cliffs, roads and gardens were deserted utterly. Crisply-lined, the town was all corners and angles, its hard edges lay stark naked to a dawn-light that was searching. The cliffs were blue with cold, and the water that heaved below them was a seaway of leaden blue. So we scudded on.

"Shall I take over?" he queried with another yawn more modest now. "Or make a cup of tea?"

Lingering intonation gave me my cue, and he

vanished to set the stove going. Course was maintained meanwhile for the North Brake Buoy, and so towards the Gull Stream, landward of the Goodwin Sands. The North Goodwin (or North Sand Head) Lightship was away on the eastward horizon.

Ramsgate was another city of the dead, but was a little remote. We were passing two miles seaward of the town, outside of the Dike and Quern shoals, treacherous places where the depth of water at low tide is little more than a couple of feet. Ramsgate lies beset by shoals; and the Old Cudd Channel, fairway for ships approaching from this direction, is only 300 yards wide, where it leads between shoal and shoal.

We sailed no longer quite alone on this forsaken sea, for a tramp steamer was plugging resolutely along astern of us, having rounded the Foreland; she—like ourselves—was shaping course for the Gull Stream. We were driving forward at a round pace with this full breeze, for it took the steamer all her time to overhaul us; she forged up astern of the yacht with the white water breaking away from the even thrust of her bows, and her propeller thud-thud-thudding as it forced her forward. She was now darkly lined against the dawn and was drawing even.

Then the red ball of the sun appeared, breaking cover over that all-treacherous expanse of shoal-sea, the sea which hides the wicked Goodwins. Under our lee lay the great shoal, grimly hidden, unseen. We swung on toward the Gull Lightship, and the protective Thanet shore had receded into

Pegwell Bay; the wind came down more freshly upon us and was knocking up a froth of sea. The yacht rolled sharply to it, with that same movement of which the cover of the Foreland had previously cured her. The long blue wave would bob up right beside, give her a twist and a wrench, and then —throwing her over on the windward roll—it would slip away seaward from under her. And then along came the next.

Neither the history nor the composition of those tide-covered Goodwin Sands to leeward can, it is said, be established with any degree of certainty. The story that the shoal was once an island, owned by Earl Godwine, is picturesque enough, but history looks askance at it. Legend has indeed saddled the Saxon Earl with responsibility for the whole affair; he neglected Tenterden church steeple, and Heaven sunk his island in anger, so that it became a desert and a grave of mariners. But the incident is unknown to serious history.

It is true that early writers mention three islands, one of which is now Thanet and the second Richborough. The third, Lomea, was quite possibly the site of the present Goodwin Sands. In that case (and it is perfectly credible) Lomea was probably submerged by an earthquake. The solid fact remains that here the grim shoal lies, nearly ten miles long by four miles broad, and—for centuries past—it has swallowed and destroyed ships and men innumerable.

Its shoal character, a danger lurking in wait and seldom openly declared, has lent it a sinister air

of mystery. The writer of *A Perambulation of Kent* in 1570 was conscious of it. He said that the shoal " is become withall a most dreadfull gulfe and ship swalower, sometime passable by foote, and sometime laied under water, so as it may be said either sea or land, or neither of both."

Shakespeare calls the Goodwins " a very dangerous flat and fatal, where the carcases of many a tall ship lie buried." The whole sand indeed must be packed full of relics. Now and again an accidental sample is brought to light. At one time, it may be an old Portuguese brass gun, dating from 1370, and at another perhaps Roman pottery and coins. Once

the gaunt sea and sand suddenly produced (almost as in jest) a respectable post-chaise, with wheels complete. Cargo it was, no doubt, from some unfortunate foundered vessel.

At the present moment, with the breeze whitening the crests of the blue water, the whole outlook was an ordinary seascape. The sands might be a fiction; apart from the lightships, there was never a sign nor a token of them. It is under the dead grey skies and at dead low water that their evil face wears its true character of desolation. Miles of grey-brown flats stretch toward the horizon, utterly forsaken, and broken only by pools and plashy gulfs and wreckage.

The upper surface of the shoal is a covering of clean sand, free of mud. Loose enough on those tidal creeks and hillocks at low water, this same sand at a depth of ten feet lies packed so closely that an iron boring tool—in literal fact—will be twisted and broken by the hardness of it.

Exploration has nevertheless been pushed to a depth of seventy-eight feet with the help of iron cylinders and atmospheric pressure. Pure chalk was there encountered. Through layers of clear bright sand, bluish sand, stone, shells and bits of chalk, and then through layers of broken shell, sea-coal, pebbles, dark fœtid sand and black clay, the rock bottom of pure chalk was at last established.

Attempts innumerable to erect permanent beacons and lighthouses on the sands were made in the past; but beacons and lighthouses alike—in the Trinity House phrase—have "disappeared." The final

LOW TIDE ON THE GOODWINS

result has been that these four Light Vessels now ride to their anchors, and buoys roll and wallow in the steep cross-seas. Of fixed beacons there are none.

"What about a nap?" my companion asked me; he was now at the tiller.

I had escaped dawn-drowsiness, and was feeling as fresh as if I had slept all night. The sun was shining and the day was with us. I had no inclination for sleep in so inspiriting a world. The yacht was still romping through the water, and Deal had been hauled abeam, about two miles distant, at half-past six.

We had entered the Downs. The cliff-face of Old Parker's Cap, sunlit white, stood up over the bows, the beginning of the chalk mass which builds itself up into the South Foreland. The foam-flecked sea washed about us, a turbulent and living green.

There Deal lay. That long low array of houses above the shingle-beach was Deal. A few vessels rocked at anchor just off the pier, but the town for the most part was fast asleep. Though without harbour facilities, Deal has been for centuries the port of the Downs, especially in the old days of sail. Passengers were there landed and embarked; it was a place of greetings and farewells. The East-Indiaman spread her white canvas and made away southward. And in years earlier, the old ships with quarter-galleries and great stern-windows were anchored here; or ships more ancient, with castellated poops and armour on their high sterns. The Deal galley-punt plied among them all.

From that steep shingle-beach at Deal the hovellers

launch their luggers in calm or storm. Smugglers in the old days to a man, they are now for the most part experts in salvage and pilotage. No risk deters them in boarding wrecks, even wrecks overwashed with immense breaking seas, in order to salve anything of value. In heavy weather they thresh staggering about, under close-reefed sails, on the look-out for a job; on the gaunt seas about the sands they are tossed and buffeted, wet to the skin, but expectant. And often, even after hours of vigilance, they return empty-handed. But always —as small-boat sailormen—they have been superbly efficient; the mastery is in their blood, they come of generations which—almost with effrontery—have defied the worst of seas in their small open boats; they remain masters.

Every rope on board the yacht was taut; the sails bellied strongly as she heeled from the wind and each sail was pulling hard. The sunlight was bright on the cabin-top and skylight and on the neat coils of rope, as she surged forward with a lift and dip and a long even roll.

Here in the Downs the sense of history becomes vague through sheer congestion. The fleets that anchored here, the actions with the French and the Dutch, the adventures of pirate and smuggler—each subject would form a separate history. The outstanding association is a memory of anchored shipping. Fleets of merchantmen or King's Ships lay wind-bound in the Downs; through all the centuries the anchorage was crowded and populous. And Deal lay on the long shore opposite, and prospered.

Guarded by the Goodwins and the shore, the anchorage afforded notable shelter; yet sometimes it proved unequal to its trust.

One evening in the reign of Queen Anne, in the year 1703, one hundred and sixty ships of sail lay anchored in the Downs. A great gale sprang up, a wind roaring and destructive out of all knowledge; in the morning only seventy ships were left, and many of these were merely floating hulls, all their masts gone by the board.

Year in, year out, the roadstead teemed with shipping. There Deal lies still, but the roadstead is empty. No longer, in calm or storm, are the great sailing ships brought up here in fleets—a city afloat. Here this morning the great roadstead, over which the yacht was skimming southward in the sunshine, lay naked and deserted. If any place can look sorrowfully out upon a scene of departed glories, that place is Deal.

Bending away south-easterly, the shoal-line of the Goodwins was still seaward of us. With this fair wind we were making good speed through the Downs.

"Wadju calc'late 's the *good* like, of them there san' banks?"

It was an old fellow ashore who once posed me with this question. There was a far-off look in his eyes as he gazed out seaward. He had not actually followed the sea since boyhood, but he had seen more than half a century of wrecks and destruction from the shore.

"Why did Providence ever put the Goodwins

there?" I hazarded, for his meaning was not clear.

"Jes' that."

I was not equal to the occasion. As he appeared mystically inclined, I touched vaguely on the poet's idea that everything "subserved some other's gain." But I felt that it was a poor effort.

His eyes left the horizon, and focussed on my face. The expression, rapt no longer, was boyish.

"Put there a-purpose to larn us summat? Same 's bugs and ticks larn us to scratch?"

Then the smile faded in an instant. "Reckon some pore blokes didn't want to be larned much, not *this* side, arter they'd found a berth up top there wot they didn't want. Howlin' wind, some cussed black night, an' riggin' all a-frozen. A dozen blokes hangin'

there, all got wives an' fam'lies ashore. Come a great wave out the blinkin' dark, and there ain't but only six."

He turned squarely from me—and spat.

As we scudded southward, the chalk cliff-land built itself up to higher levels beside us. We were really leaving our immediate subject over the stern of the yacht, for we were now definitely forsaking the shoalwaters in favour of good straightforward sea. Yet it may be worth while to carry on with her to Dover. Between the North Foreland and Harwich one's anchorages are in the natural creeks and inlets; beyond the North Foreland, the places of shelter are artificial harbours. Before returning to the shoals and creeks, we can take, by way of contrast, a little interlude beside the upstanding solidity of great cliffs and stone-built harbour walls.

The Goodwin Sands lie to seaward of a dead flat stretch of coastland. Opposite the flat land lies the shoal. But, at each end of the levels of Deal and Sandwich, the shore rises to bluff chalk forelands, North and South. Concurrently, and opposite the same two spots, the shoal-level of the Goodwins drops down to healthy soundings and honest sea.

Thus as the chalk cliff-land rose to bolder levels beside us, we were abreast of the lightship at the South Sand Head, and clear of the shoal. St. Margaret's Bay was soon abeam, with sunlight bright upon its perpendicular chalk cliffs, and on the dark green trees which nestle in the curved recess. Then up climbs the cliff-line again nearly

to 400 feet, to the South Foreland lighthouse. The wreck of the great sailing-ship *Preussen*, cut as if with a knife, lay at base of the chalk boulders, with the waves breaking upon it.

The yacht was spinning through the water; she was moving really fast. Above and beside her, on the starboard hand, towered those superb faces of chalk, while over the starboard bow was the eastern mole of Dover Harbour, also the detached mole, end on. White against blue, the harbour walls and lighthouses were cut with a snap in the sunlight, clean white above blue water.

With her long track of foam, the Calais packet was shaping course for Dover, right across our bows, and she entered the harbour by the eastern entrance. We cut through the diminishing white lather; then, after catching a brief glimpse of quieter water and anchored vessels inside the harbour, we were rollicking merrily on, at seaward side of the detached mole. It was a morning alive with wind and sunshine and the wash of breaking water.

"Twenty to eight—7.40. What time was it that we left Brightlingsea last night?"

The time was jotted. It had been at five o'clock yesterday evening that we left Brightlingsea; the passage had occupied less than fifteen hours, which —considering that we had been becalmed part of the time—was reasonably good.

So the yacht reached snugly along to Folkestone, and on toward Dungeness. After a day of sea and sunshine, she was back at Dover in the afternoon, and beat into the harbour by the western

entrance. She came to anchor close to the Promenade Pier.

Blinking into wakefulness after a short sleep, we found a bright but unquiet world about us. Sunshine was clean and brilliant, but the wind was hard from the north-east, and the yacht was dipping bowsprit under. Dover Outer Harbour is really no place for a small yacht, and we had decided to spoil our night's rest again by putting her into the Inner Harbour on the night tide. She would be at Dover for some days. For the present the yacht dipped and splashed in the strong blue water, and the white cliffs and the keep of Dover Castle towered above us on the landward side.

When night had fallen, the recurrent greenish flash of Gris Nez was visible through the harbour entrance. Close upon midnight, we had broken out our anchor and hoisted sail; we were sailing out toward the end of the Prince of Wales Pier. The wind had calmed down to a light breeze, but it was still plenty; it pushed us comfortably over the tide which just now was setting strongly into the harbour (the drift changes from hour to hour inside), and we were almost level with the pier-head. Then the wind, with a perversity almost laughable, dropped dead flat all in an instant, and the tide sent us flying through the night, stern-first, shoreward. We got the sweep out and slashed the water with it; we towed with the dinghy and we strained and we sweated, and we pulled and we whistled.

If that breeze had but been staunch for two

minutes longer we should have been spared nearly an hour of sweat and fury. Having tumbled into the dinghy in the darkness, and got the tow-rope fast, I was pulling hard.

"No good against this tearing tide," I panted. "Not a blessed breath. Can't move her. This blinking sweat runs into my eyes. Dock-gates 'll be shut. Yes, keep her straight."

The lights of Dover front trembled and quivered in the dark water, and the starlight glittered, crystal-clear, above. I panted and sweated still, and bubbled with disjointed vehemence.

"We shall have to let go. Have the anchor ready. Half a minute. Yes, yes, she'll do it; the sails are pulling. Come on, blow, blow, little breeze. Not a bit; back she goes. Bad as ever."

At last, however, we rounded the green pier-head lights and were slipping up the dark harbour-way toward the dock. Lights, red and white, were close ahead.

"Name of vessel?"

A deep voice from some neighbouring haunt of darkness boomed over our heads; and I was put through an inquisition as to port of origin, destination and cargo, while we slid smoothly through velvety gloom. It was very dark. Our mainsail, high up in the night, was invisible against the dark background of the sleeping town. The harbour-water caught up the yellow lights, and danced them about in a maze of reflection. Black pier-heads jutted here and there. The place was a little confusing in the night; but a hoarse voice, from

ST. MARGARETS · BAY.'

some quarter unseen, indicated the red lights as those between which we had to steer. In we went, and were berthed up beside a timber-schooner in the Granville Dock shortly after 2 a.m. We slept.

Piled up above us in the darkness were the cliffs of Dover; around us was the dark town. Dover—like the Downs—is too full of history for just appreciation, but also—like the Downs—it has one master association. Dover is the key and entrance of England.

Somewhere in the dark above us were the remains of the Roman lighthouse, which led into a natural harbour of immemorial age. Then the Saxons

fortified the great cliff commanding the entrance; William of Normandy captured the fortress without striking a blow, and his successors built the gaunt Keep as warden of the port. King after king has embarked here, Richard Cœur-de-Lion for his great crusade or Henry VIII on the *Great Harry*; and a score of crowned kings beside. And their queens, brought to haven here, had come to their new home and adopted kingdom.

. . . . .

It was more than a week later when, stretched in my bunk in the cabin in the dull twilight of early dawn, I listened—with protest and aversion—to the frenzy of the alarm clock. Bed never felt snugger. It was five o'clock on a dull damp summer morning; we were fully provisioned, water and paraffin had been put on board; and we were bound Thames-ward to-day.

Even at this early hour the inevitable knot of loiterers assembled to gaze down at the yacht's deck with patient curiosity. It was the same yesterday when, with bucket and mop, I was cleaning the Dover dirt from her; they almost jostled for places. Pleasant fellows they were; and when I asked them to cast off the warps, they tumbled over one another in their willingness and goodwill.

Our sails were up and we were crossing the dock. The yacht looked for a moment like bumping one of the piers, as the wind came in gusts, but she slid through, and the cheery Harbour Foreman looked down from the wall, wishing good luck. She cleared the gates and the tidal harbour was before her.

The tidal harbour was before her, but something else was also before her upon which she had not counted. A rope was stretched clean across the fairway. A big ketch yacht was intending to enter, and her crew were laying out a warp to a mooring-buoy. Both parties, both they and ourselves, were a little startled.

"Go to loo'ard of it! Go to loo'ard of it."

Three men were bellowing at once. The red-faced skipper of the yacht was brandishing his arms, and a hand in the yacht's dinghy over at the mooring-buoy was doing the same.

We, leaving the harbour, had the right of way; and was it likely that I should throw away all my hoarded windward space and foul the piles on the lee side? I had no hesitation (there was no time for it) and I sent them back three words:

"Drop the warp."

The man in the dinghy took one look at the white foam round the yacht's bows, and he acted with decision fully equal to my own. He dropped it. He dropped that rope overboard as if it burned him. The skipper grinned after us in a friendly way; he had tried to bluff, and respected us for not being fooled. So down we went and rounded the Prince of Wales Pier, brought the wind aft, and shaped course across the harbour for the eastern entrance.

Morning was very overcast, but there was a stiff breeze, south-west; in direction it was thoroughly fair, provided that it was not bringing too much sea. We were ready for a tumble in the cross-sea just outside the entrance—everything was snug

below and the dinghy was on two stout painters. The waves were heaping themselves as they ran along the detached mole; then, as they curved landward with the curve of the wall, they rolled straight to shore across the eastern entrance. For that, one was ready. We could not turn to head the waves without gybing, and—if we gybed and changed course—we might get blanketed by the harbour wall and fall out of control. Clearly it was best to push on and take things as we found them. The margin of smooth water was narrowing; the high harbour walls were on each side of her; she was through.

The first toppling wave-crest took her, rolled her honestly and dropped her; the next we could see coming—it was just upon us. It was an uncommon giant, double the size of the others as it licked along the Mole, and a second wave was carried along with it, humped upon its shoulder. The wave was breaking as it came, and it had us on the beam almost as soon as we saw it. We hunched our shoulders against the expected deluge.

It came. There was perhaps nothing serious in the matter of green water on board of us, but it looked solid enough as it went streaming and washing about the decks. Instinctively we looked astern for the dinghy, half expecting to see it swamped, but—as usual—the little egg-shell came up smiling. It flicked jauntily through the tumbling white bubbles, and went slithering down into the trough not a penny the worse. This was the only wave that troubled us; standing a little off shore, the seas

were brought aft as soon as we shaped course for the Downs, the breaking seas heaped up behind us—but, squarely astern, they were no trouble.

Here again was St. Margaret's Bay—no land of sunlit cliff and golden turf to-day, but sombre land, drab-coloured. We gybed and held on coast-wise; it was good going; past Kingsdown and Walmer, we were soon off Deal Pier. This fine full-bodied wind rounded and bellied our canvas, but the land was now to weather; sheltered thus, we were in smooth water as we headed for the Ramsgate Channel, the channel which leads not only landward of the Goodwin Sands but land-ward of the Brake Shoal also. Out in the Gull Stream we could see the white caps of the waves, beyond the shelter of the weather-shore. Still further out lay the Goodwins.

"I've heard tell of blokes ashore there, walkin' about on the Sands—see 'em from shore at low water. Howlin' gale a-blowin', an' seas a-smashin' over top o' some vessel agroun' there, wot's gone to bits. *See* 'em walk about at low water, *see* 'em from shore. And no boat couldn't git nigh the sand, couldn't live in the sea. *Watch* 'em walk about, and know them good as dead. Come the sea high-water—all washed clean. Gone."

It was the same man who had spoken before. Whether there have been authenticated instances I am unable to say, but it is very probable. A case of the kind was quoted by Defoe, but in that instance, —contrary to expectation—the men were ultimately saved.

Over the bows of the yacht was a regular medley of shoal. The Downs are like a deep-water bay in the system of sands, and all is shoal to northward; but two channels lead through—the big Gull Stream and the little Ramsgate Channel. Quite apart from the excellent system of buoyage—the leading marks on shore can put a vessel safely between the banks. For the Gull Stream, the ship keeps the South Foreland lighthouse faithfully in the middle of Old Stairs Bay all the time, and through she goes. Shoal is hungry and wicked on both sides, but the deep water never fails. The Goodwins of late years are said to be shoaling landward, and pilots incline to keep the lighthouse on one side of the bay rather than dead in the middle; but the principle is the same.

The little Ramsgate Channel is much narrower. It makes its small and resolute slit through the banks on landward side of the Brake Shoal—a sandbank which does not actually uncover, but comes very near the surface at low water, so that a bather could stand there without getting his bathing-dress wet. The Channel gives a steady ten feet. When the Goodwins are visible on the horizon, a grey-brown desert to seaward, and the Brake is lying in wait on one side and the Sandwich Flats on the other, the yacht can lay her course between them with complete confidence.

The leading marks for this Ramsgate Channel are eminently clear. The white cliff of Old Parker's Cap, on with the end of Deal Pier astern, leads right away through. A lather of dangerous shoal-

sea may be breaking on either hand, but the Channel is sure. A child could hit it off.

Through the grey sea the yacht held course toward Ramsgate. The coast-line began to fall away from her, in toward Richborough to westward. There lay Pegwell Bay, once the great tidal estuary upon which the Roman Portus Rutupinus stood. The site of Sandwich (now inland) was then covered by the sea, and Richborough was an island. Sandwich, one of the Cinque Ports, became a place of note. It was "diched and mudde-waulled" and it had a broad tidal estuary. But it never recovered from the effect of the great carrack sunk

in the fairway " in Pope Paulus' tyme." The foolish inhabitants let it lie. Sand and mud silted round it and created a bar, and the port was gradually ruined.

In Roman times a deep-water channel led right through into the Thames estuary to the westward of Thanet, and Thanet was a real island. It is a far cry to the days of Roman Empire, but sometimes one can fancy the old Kent cliffs standing up, free of houses and of railways and tramways, and the blue water stretching past a harbourless Ramsgate shore—all virgin cliff-land and green turf—into the great inlet. The Roman war-galleys and transports would be anchored in the Sound.

An hour after passing Deal we were off Ramsgate Harbour, and passing close to the grey stone piers. The place is said to have possessed a harbour of some sort since the days of Henry VIII, but its first serious attempt dates from 1749. The early harbour silted so badly that it seemed likely to become useless, and Smeaton, on being called in, installed sluices which cleared the mud. Of later years the Ramsgate tug, with steam always up, has been of unmeasured use in assisting shipping round about the shoalwaters, evil places in storm.

There was ample water here for our light draught, and we stood close inshore beside the white Thanet cliffs which lead to the North Foreland. With no weather-shore, the water was rough. But the wind was breaking up the clouds; slanted gleams of sunshine silvered the grey water here and there, and then the clouds broke clean apart and left

great spaces of blue. Sunshine sprang into being, and lit up the low white landfalls; it was a bright and breezy coast. And the dark sea romped about us.

Broadstairs (no forsaken grass pasture-land of Roman days, nor city of the dead as in the early dawn) was teeming with life and colour. With a broken white wake astern the yacht drove through the broken blue. The North Foreland lighthouse was passed, and the mainsheet had been hauled in as we stood for the Longnose Buoy. The long ledge of chalk rock stretches seaward of the Point, and the sea-gulls were circling and settling on the water above it.

Off the North Foreland our comfortable speed was bound to suffer eclipse. The ebb tide was pouring down seaward past Margate and the wind was veering westerly, thoroughly dead foul for the Thames. It is less than three sea-miles from the Buoy to Margate Jetty, but we—close-hauled to the wind and thrashing to and fro shoreward and off-shore—took almost three hours to accomplish it. We did not grumble. After the cold grey seaway of Dover, this summer-blue was genial and indulgent; time was of no consequence.

The wind, as it veered, was taking off, and the sea was settling down. The tide would soon be coming to help us, and the crowded sea-front of Margate would then drop away astern of us, becoming gradually a thing of the past.

IV

THE OVERLAND PASSAGE

"I SHALL soon get out and push, if she doesn't get a move on."

So he said, but nothing was further from his thoughts—nor indeed from my own either. The nearest equivalent would be towage in the dinghy: and, even had there been a flat calm, the afternoon was much too golden for needless labour.

As it was, a pleasant little breeze was blowing athwart us, and there was a blue sea; but wind and tide were both for the present contrary.

"The tide 'll be turning soon," I yawned back, "and we shall get a move on then."

In the meantime we could enjoy this golden summer afternoon, with sunshine bright upon the white sails above us, upon blue water around and upon the long low line of white Kentish cliff. Margate was now definitely passed, and we were bound for the Thames.

The orthodox course for a big ship after passing the North Foreland, London-bound, would be northerly still. Straight away from Kent she would steer due north for a distance of four or five miles, before she began to turn one inch in the direction

of the Thames. The nearest big shipway, parallel with the north coast of Kent, is six or seven miles off-shore.

We were neglecting the big shipways this time; our channel was the "overland passage." As we beat to and fro, we were seldom more than a mile from the low chalk coast-line; for the time being, the Gore Channel was our local fairway.

"That there Gore Channel," an old tug-master had once said to me, "that there ole Gore Channel, I don't take no account of it. Tell you for why."

He was not a regular Thames man himself, but a south-coaster. He was often in and out of London all the same, and I lent my ear greedily, hoping for words of wisdom.

"Tell you for why," he continued. "My mate an' I, we had to bring two tugs up to Lunnon. Noo 'uns. My mate was in t'other one, a-followin' me. We come up in fine weather, and run into fog 'fore we git to Dover. I felt the shore quite comfortable, Dover fog-horn a-boomin' on my port hand, an' him a-tootin' astern, answerin' me. That's all right.

"Come the Sou' Foreland, the fog it all roll up like a blanket. Never see anythin' so purty. Sun a-shinin' an' blue sea an' all."

He passed his brown hand across his eyes, feeling that he had digressed. "Yes, yes," he recalled himself, "that there Gore Channel, as I sez.

"We pass inshore the Elbow, and I lay course noath clear o' the Sands. *He*, he doubles round past Margit. Short-cut through that there Gore Channel, so *he* thinks.

"That ain't no short-cut," the old skipper added conclusively. "Tell you for why; there warn't nought in it, not when we meet at the Girdler, not as you might say a yard."

Used to deep-water channels, neither the skipper nor his mate had realized how to exploit the real short-cut, though it is locally so well known. After ascertaining the draught of the tugs and the state of the tide, I was able to play oracle. "What on earth," I asked him, "was the mate doing at the Girdler at all? He had no right to be near it. If he'd only held straight on south of the Spaniard and Spile and through the Jenkin Swatchway, he'd have beaten you hands down."

The old skipper looked almost bewildered. "You figure it's shorter like?" he said.

"Try it out on your own chart," I advised him.

The fact is that the deep-water channels have been kept by Nature six or seven miles away from shore by a broad system of shallows known at the Kentish Flats. Nowhere is there a depth of three fathoms at low water, and some of the sands dry out. But straight across it all, almost in a bee-line from Margate to the Thames, is a channel which gives a depth of nearly four fathoms at high water, and proportionate depths at other states of the tide. It is called the Four-fathom Channel, or the Overland Passage, and is greatly used by barges and other vessels of light draught.

The old Margate hoy used to sail this way. There was not much joy on board of her in foul weather. She plied to and from London, generally

overcrowded, and the skipper was often too lazy to work to windward. He would anchor for hours or even days in contrary winds, with his crowded shipload of sea-sick passengers, heaving and pitching in a dirty seaway. Dishevelled and ill, people were sometimes (so it is seriously recorded) beyond recognition when they were ultimately released and landed.

Margate itself is not merely modern. It was a sub-member of the Cinque Ports, connected with Dover; and, although its harbour dries out completely, it was a place of embarkation for the Continent.

Margate, however, was now astern of us; and at four o'clock the tide had turned; the tidal current was off and away in the direction of London Bridge. Instead of robbing us of half of the fruits of our patient gains, it was adding liberal interest. This was better. With Birchington to south of us, we had fairly left Margate Road and the South Channel and were entering the Gore. The Hook Sands, which dry out at low water, would soon close on us to northward.

The wind had taken off so much that the yacht, sailing close-hauled, was as steady as a church. Tea is a fairweather meal. When the elements are boisterous, it is never given a thought; but when the sunlight is genial and the blue sea friendly, the teapot is seldom left idle in the locker.

Tea was over, and I was exercising the mop upon the crockery.

"That's another blessing of good weather," I

said, "you get the washing-up done under way. It's not left till you're yawning your head off at night and wanting to turn in."

So—the tide helping us—we passed south of the Hook Sands, and by six o'clock we had hauled the Reculver Buoy abeam and had reached the Kentish Flats.

The twin towers of Reculver stood up on the coast a mile or two to the southward, with the evening sunlight upon them. Here, when Thanet was really an island, was the "way out" into the Thames. From Sandwich the Roman vessel would pass, westward of Thanet, through the Wantsum, into the open salt water again at Reculver. Regulbium it was then called. If bound for London, she

would hold course through the Swale (south of Sheppey) right across the present Chitney Marshes into the Medway, and thence—*south* of the Isle of Grain—into the Thames. It is stated that, up to the fourteenth century, the Swale was the main waterway for the approach to London.

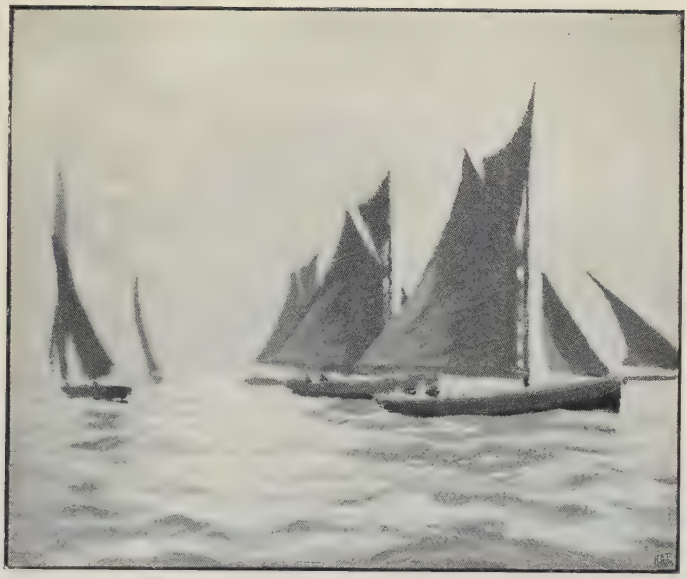
The Roman edition of Reculver had an eight-acre Castrum, and the fortress possessed walls twelve feet thick. It may then have stood about a mile inland, but by the year 1780 the sea had so far encroached that the northern wall went down with a fall of the cliff. Thirty years later the local Vandals set to work and pulled down the ancient Christian church which had been built within the Castrum. Incidentally they turned the vicarage into a public-house. Two Roman columns in the church were sold to a farmer for stone rollers. All that was finally left were a few monumental Roman walls, some shattered and some hidden by the soil, and all covered with ivy and elder-bushes.

Sad it is that these relics of history have been so rigorously obliterated. What little is left looks indeed to be well secured against further corrosion by the sea, which had been regularly advancing two feet every year. The land (as seen from the water) bristles with pile-defences. But little that is ancient remains for hand of man to disturb. The Roman stronghold—on the "Saxon Shore"—stood proof in its time against the northern rovers who would come raiding up these ancient waters, fierce figures in their strange sinister vessels. It has gone. Ethelbert, King of Kent, used the Roman flints to

build a palace here. It has gone. Bassa, the Mass Priest, built a minster. It has gone. Eadred built a monastery. It has gone. When the "poor Nuns of Davington" were shipwrecked at Reculver, the Abbess (so it is said) built the old twin towers as a memorial of the event and a warning to future mariners. They too have gone. Here, from the sea, we can see alone the twin towers, the Sisters, built by Trinity House upon the old site, still to serve as a seamark and a guide to mariners.

To northward of us, always submerged, lay the Pan Sand, with its cement boulders. It is possible that the Pan Sand was once an island. At all events the oyster-dredgers bring up, time and again, relics of Samian pottery from the sea-bottom; and the question of how they got there has intrigued many investigators. Some say that a shipload of crockery foundered, others that it represents an ancient pottery on land since overwhelmed by the sea.

It is now, whatever be its history, a part of the Kentish Flats—part of the seascape over which Herne Bay and Whitstable look, and where they see the great waves topping, in the hard north-easter. Seen from Herne Bay Pier on a fine day, there stretches a wide seascape of level and indifferent blue, but all the contour of the sea-bottom has been explored through all the generations, learned by the lead, and exploited with trawl and dredge. It has its localities and corners as definitely as the countryside has uplands and valleys. The old names lingered, names of old



WHITSTABLE SMACKS ON THE OYSTER GROUNDS

tradition and word-of-mouth, and they are now given permanency by inclusion on the modern chart. There they are—Clite-hole, Stud-hill, Pudding Pan, Woolpack and so on. It was rough old shellbacks, men long dead before the Middle Ages, who first gave some of the shoals these old-world names of theirs.

Evening approached, and sunset and twilight would soon be upon us. The wind had veered westerly, and was right ahead. We had set out to sail up the Overland Passage, and had hoped to reach the Medway or Hole Haven on this tide, but Whitstable or the East Swale would now have to suffice for to-night. The tide would soon be turning. An anchorage in the East Swale off Shellness would be the snuggest possible berth with the wind in this quarter. We beat on slowly from the Whitstable Street Buoy to the Pollard Spit.

Whitstable, with the grouped masts of its oyster-dredgers, lay remote in the failing light. The Whitstable anchorage is only really vulnerable when the wind blows strongly from the north. It is landlocked from the south and west, and on the east is that remarkable ancient causeway, stretching three-quarters of a mile seaward, called the Street. It is locally believed to represent part of a submerged town, and the dredgers frequently bring up Roman bricks in their "drudges." Whitstable lies quite snugly entrenched, until a gale comes swooping suddenly from the north. There is apt to be a toll of damage then, and many vessels during its history have been blown ashore and wrecked.

The hulls of the smacks are sturdily charactered, to withstand the heavy strain of bumping on the bottom as they dry out or refloat in heavy weather.

" On one o' *they*," said a Whitstable man, jerking an appreciative finger at the fleet, " happen anyone sail her same's you, and git caught p'r'aps on the Barrow Sand, well, ye know you're a'right. The sea might knock the bottom out'n ordinary boat; she doan take no notice."

And the mooring-chains that they use at Whitstable are—for craft of this size—things to admire and wonder at, until one remembers what sort of ground-tackle must be required when one of those real north-easters is bringing the North Sea in on top of Whitstable.

The very name of Whitstable is almost one with oyster, by long association; and off Whitstable lie the famous oyster-beds. The beds are numbered, with oysters of graded maturity bedded out upon them; and the " fish " brought up in the dredges are classified A, B, C or D according to size. Those which are too juvenile even to be graded D are called " brood " or " spat," and are laid out in appropriate beds to grow up properly.

Up comes the dredge with its specimens of the sea-bottom—stones, seaweed, tin cans, star-fish (" five fingers "), crabs, whelks and what not, and all this rubbish is dumped down on deck of the " yawl." The Whitstable smack—though generally cutter-rigged—is still called a " yawl."

" One, two, yes, I doubt there ain't three come up this time."

As the dredge was coming over the side, the experienced eye had spied the oysters, the real oysters, indistinguishable to ordinary eyes from the stones and empty oyster-shells innumerable. Over goes the rubbish into the water again, and the empty dredge follows it. Next time it comes up crammed with star-fish and never a sign of an oyster.

"Them blinkin' old five-fingers, beggared we doan fetch up a few ton o' they, one o' these days, an' dump 'em ashore. Farm manure."

Little mud seems brought up from the sea-bottom here. I commented on the fact to an old Whitstable skipper.

" Ships rollen it over an' over, they kip it clean," was the reply. " That groun' out theer," and the eloquent finger was again jerked, " the old man, he didn't work 'un awhile. Ye see it's like a garden; it lay theer an' slob up. Ye coulden *scrape* the muck off 'en."

The final pronoun, unknown to the ordinary English language, referred to the oysters and not the beds. For, after the oysters are brought up, their shells are well scrubbed to make them the more presentable. Hence, in part, the resentment against beds that " slob up."

It was too dark now for many ships to be under way, and the fleet was at its moorings. Nor was there even one of those double-ended open boats, which are often to be seen by day, tut-tut-tutting along under motor-power. They originally came from Sheringham, men and all, and they fish for whelks. " Them whilkers," the free-born Whitstable men call the intruders, and their glance still perhaps has a touch of hostility as they scan the small dark hull that staggers and jounces, tumbling onward through the steep grey seas.

On the starboard hand of the yacht lay the Columbine Shoal, and the unlighted buoys were just visible in the waning light. Further on was the Ham Gat Buoy, marking the swatchway that leads Thames-ward, through the shoal.

" Where did you bring up? " I asked a smacksman one day.

" Yonder; along o' M," was the equivalent of the reply.

"What?" I said. "M?"

"Ay, that's it. 'Em, 'longside the Gat."

He saw my look of bewilderment, and a grin puckered his weather-seamed face.

"That's what us chaps call it. 'Em an' Sea-salter." And then, for my benefit, he translated it into its more orthodox rendering. "H—ham," he articulated with great difficulty and precision, and with a world of emphasis on the aspirate.

The town faded away in the dusk as the yacht crept slowly up the mouth of the Swale between the Pollard Spit and Ham Gat Buoys. Darkness had fallen, and the line of the sunset was a brown haze along the western sky behind Sheppey as she reached quietly in the lessening breeze up beside Shellness at top of the tide. After locating the edge of the deep-water channel with the lead, she "let go." The sails were furled and the riding-light fastened to the forestay. The decks were damp with the dew. This silent estuary in the late brown dusk was delicate-toned and mysterious, a serene contrast to the lumpy seas of the cold grey morning when, fifteen hours ago, the bowsprit was turned seaward from Dover Harbour, or to the bright heaving blue and white off the North Foreland. It was after midnight before we had the heart to turn in.

With wind westerly, the shelter afforded by Shellness is complete, for the deep-water channel is so close inshore. But if the wind decides to shift southerly or to run off-shore, and blow, the merit of the spot is suddenly at a discount. The yacht will begin to dig her bowsprit into the waves,

and free objects in the cabin will commence to roll about and clatter, grindings and creakings will be insistent everywhere. In that event it is time to get under way, and if the yacht does not elect to turn seaward and decamp altogether, she will shape course up behind the island to Harty Ferry, just beyond Faversham Creek, where her peace of mind will be restored in landlocked water.

Here she will lie in the East Swale, a channel which—although a mere backwater now—was once the main approach to London River. And not without reason was that route adopted. The ugly shoals of the outside channels, the hard, dangerous sandbanks, were not then buoyed and lighted and charted as now; there they lurked, hidden away under deceptive blue water save when the low tide uncovered them for a passing hour, or the storm seas declared their position by breaking heavily upon them. The Roman galley which piled up on the shoal outside in rough weather was lost, but the galley ashore in the Swale would only sit on the mud until the tide returned.

Ashore at the Ferry Hard, an unfrequented end of Sheppey is discovered.

"Ain't nothin' there, not a blessed thing. Sherness an' Quinbro' up t'other end. Nothin' 't all here."

So the smacksman dismissed it, and there is little, in fact, beyond open landscape. An inn, a farm or two, and an ancient church (with sheep browsing in the churchyard perhaps) are the few features that betoken living occupation.

Man is lord at present, but he was not the first occupier. "A monstrous eft was of old the Lord and Master of Earth," says the poet, and the biologists for once are on the side of literature. "Crocodilian reptiles" were here in Sheppey, and boa-constrictors; birds with great beaks armed with teeth went straddling evilly over the land. Their remains have been found, but they (not altogether to one's sorrow) are gone.

Time wiped them all out. Gibbering and barbarous man followed; then the stern and civilized Roman with his war galleys invaded the island. And again Time expunged them. In the ninth and tenth centuries the Norsemen often occupied Sheppey, and their "Dragons" wintered in the Swale. The great-limbed warriors wintered in the island; the only records of them now are the mounds which marked their burial-places.

But—whatever my budding merits as historian—I have proved an indifferent pilot. I set out for the Four-fathom Channel, and find myself wedged in at the back of Sheppey. It is no unusual effect in

sailing. Contrary winds, and calms and storms—all these upset one's casual itineraries; now, therefore, in order to render a more complete account of the Overland Passage, it may be best to return to the North Foreland and pick up another expedition there.

. . . . .

The yacht had come merrily round the North Foreland one September afternoon, and—although the tide was against her—she was smilingly confident, for a full-bodied south-easterly breeze was swelling those sunlit sails of hers. She had gybed at Foreness Buoy, and was now shaping course for the Gore Channel. She had soon left Margate astern; golden light was dazzling on the water ahead—a regular path of gold as the sun began to dip towards the horizon. Astern was deep blue sea and clear blue sky, and a line of chalk cliffs, creamy white in the low sunlight. It was a perfect evening.

Either the opposing spring-tide had been gathering body or the wind was taking off very rapidly, but we were not distinguishing ourselves. Birchington hung persistently where it was. The yacht was vigorously parting the blue water, and sending the foam billowing away from her as she drove on; but the shore-marks were positively sluggish in changing positions. The wind was fair, so that a makeshift spinnaker boom had been rigged, and a big jib and the foresail bent as spinnakers, but nothing would quicken her. Guessing, therefore, that the ebb would be at its strongest in the orthodox

channel, I decided to cheat the tide by forsaking the main deep-water, in hope of being able to slide through into the Copperas Channel and so make Herne Bay. In that manner we held course for some time, thus diverging gradually more and more from an unladen barge under full sail, which had been in sight since we had rounded the North Foreland, and was close at hand when we deserted the narrow fairway. With sunlight full upon her brown sails and the white water at her bows, she was a picture.

"You'll git aground if you lay course inshore same 's that."

This voice echoed, stentorian, from the brown-sailed barge. I could see that the skipper was perturbed at our defection; it was rank heresy to him, and he had watched with cold disapproval as I plied the lead while the two vessels slowly diverged.

"Wadjer draw?" he added.

"Four-foot-six," I called. It was sheer kindness on his part, I knew; but I also knew my own business.

"Well, tell yer wot," he roared back, and paused with dramatic intensity, "*I*'d be aground if I wes in there same 's you, an' I'm only drawin' two-foot-three."

Better brains than mine must expound it. Personally I should find it difficult (short of sinking her outright) to put a ship drawing two-foot-three aground where a ship drawing four-foot-six was afloat.

The man on the barge was evidently one of those

coastwise men who work by practical knowledge only and never use a chart. To him, the Horse and Gore alone were right, and everything on either hand was danger and destruction.

We held gallantly onward, but we failed to make Herne Bay. As night drew on the wind took off, so that the tide seemed likely to defeat us even here. Not minded to let the tide run down too far while she was over the shallows, the yacht stood off into deeper water under the afterglow of a copper-coloured sunset. There was now little prospect of further real progress until turn of tide. She was westward of the Margate Hook Beacon, and was still creeping on through the dark, steering by compass.

"The Girdler's gone!"

The light of the Girdler Light Vessel as it flashed at its half-minute intervals had been clear and snappy, a bead of gold on the dark horizon until now, but from this moment onward it had vanished. There was evidently a bank of night mist spreading over the sea.

"The wind's gone!"

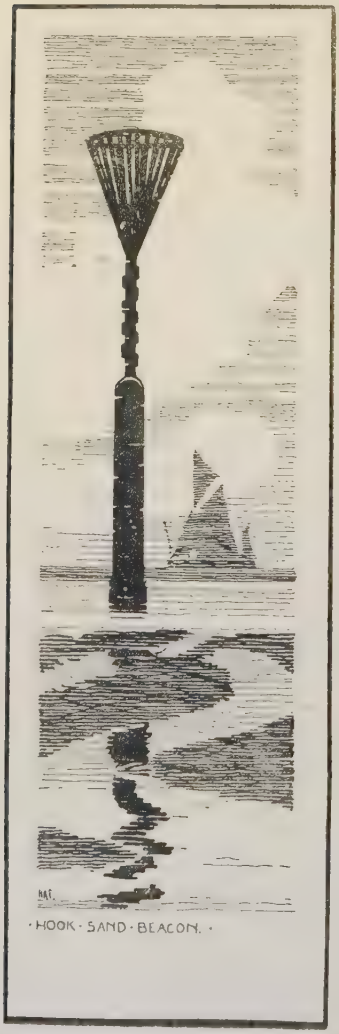
So it had. After holding on well after sunset, it had dropped dead in an instant. The anchor followed it. Not a moment was lost. Here we knew our position, but if we began to drift with the ebb, out of control in the dark, we might wander Heaven knows where, perhaps on to the Hook Sand. In that event rough weather in the night would probably mean a total wreck. The cable rattled down, and gradually took the strain, until the

chain stood in a taut diagonal line from the fairlead to the water, like a bar of iron. We were stationary, and the tide was swiftly racing seawards, bubbling past us into the dark North Sea astern.

The sails, which hung limply in the darkness above, were furled and stowed. They were wet to the touch. Everything around us was vague and dark, for the dull pall of cloud was closing in and making the dark sea yet darker. Not a light was visible anywhere; there was nothing but the darkness and the sound of the tide.

The riding-light—a yellow star in the darkness—was soon up. Ordinarily it is not pleasant to be anchored at sea in fog, especially at night, because the steamers carry on; and an anchor watch is advisable. But here there was no cause for anxiety. There was a dark world, a dim wilderness of shoal and shoalwater, nearly five miles wide between our berth here and the nearest steamer traffic in Prince's Channel: the Margate Sand, the Hook Sand, the Woolpack, Last and Tongue all helped to entrench us. This channel of ours is little used by steamers by day; and, being entirely unlighted, it is quite out of favour at night. The only vessels which habitually use the Horse and Gore channels are the local smacks and barges, and they, like ourselves, would be kept out of serious mischief by the absence of wind. After pausing a short while to appreciate yet once again the weirdness and isolation of dead utter darkness on the shoalwater world, we turned in.

Wind in the night would have awakened me.



There was none. Stillness was complete, and the sea had settled to entire smoothness. I looked out at five in the morning. Day was breaking. There were white mist-banks all round the yacht, but above the mist to eastward was the strong flush of the dawn, and sky and sea were coldly blue. Again there was extraordinary remoteness and isolation; we were absolutely alone.

I sat alone in the well, I suppose, for an hour; I was almost awed by it—the solemn enchantment of everything. It was just as one might sit at an organ recital in a cathedral.

The tide had risen in the night, and was now ebbing seaward again. Then out of the mist loomed a sail, and soundlessly bore down toward the yacht; the ship was

a smack, drifting broadside with the tide, her trawl being down. She passed close by.

"Morning. Very misty," I said.

"Mornin'," and the smacksman looked round him. "Ay, it's clearer now," the words reverberated from a deep-chested voice; "it were that thick in the night, we must a troled up close agenst you, and we never see your light, not a glimmer of her, we didn't."

She slid smoothly by us, and was gently obliterated, dissolved by the mist to seaward. We were again alone.

The sun was now a bright smudge of warm colour through the curtain of grey; then the fog reasserted itself. It folded itself closely about us, it shrouded the sun, it veiled the blue above, and it turned the blue sea grey. It also turned me cabin-wards; I slept again in the friendly warmth below.

At dead low water the Hook Sand was visible, two or three hundred yards away. We pulled across in the dinghy and landed. The sand is deeply ribbed by action of the tide and there are many pools. We paced across the brown ribbed sea-sand in the keen morning air to the other side of the shoal; mist expunged the distances, but the sea was again blue and the sun was shining. We might have been miles upon miles from any land. Nothing was visible but sea and sand and sky.

Then—as the tide began to rise—a friendly easterly breeze began to blur the smoothness of the blue surface. We were back on board and away. As ill luck would have it (through having been out

of touch with the shore for several days) we had to put in to Herne Bay and provision. It was a waste of good wind and tide. Soon after the digression, however, we were back in our orthodox channel again, running free with a strong breeze and sluicing tide, between the Columbine and Spaniard Shoals; the Mid Spaniard Buoy was heaving and rocking to northward, and the Spile Buoy would soon be over the bow. Afternoon sunshine was golden upon the earth cliffs of Sheppey, and the Whitstable oyster-fleet was returning home to its moorings. Bright brown sails, they were spotted over the blue sea to southward.

The wind was singing now, and it was a fair breeze; as long as the tide was in our favour, we merrily spilled the miles behind us beyond the white foam of our wake. We shaped course across the Medway fairway for the Jenkin Swatchway, south of the Nore Shoal.

But before we could haul the Nore abeam the tide had ceased to be an ally, and had become hostile. Running down hard against the wind, a hollow sea was scooped out; we began to lift and heave with a long-sustained movement as the foam-capped following seas swelled up behind, caught and lifted the counter, and then—as they passed—left us to subside with that sound of the bursting of a whole lather of bubbles. We stood across to Leigh Middle.

The tide was running full against us, and the seas were shorter and steeper. A poor thing it seems to say, on an evening of strong low sunshine, with deep blue waves about us and a strong breeze, but

the sailing was not really pleasant. The dinghy was flung by the waves right at the counter, and it snapped back every time with a strain that seemed certain to part both painters. That was the trouble. We were certainly on the edge of a gybe, and certainly on the edge of the flats (in order to cheat the tide), and all the innumerable barges beating down with the ebb had the right of way of us, and could, if they chose, force us to gybe out into deep water and the full run of the tide. Those things, however, were all in the game and not in the least troublesome. It was the dinghy that was the annoyance. Up it would come, lifted on the crest of the wave. It would knock the counter smartly, and then drop back with the tide as the yacht heaved forward with the wave and the wind. Cleats and painters were staunch and they held. But the "crack" and shock of the sudden *tug* shook the very yacht every time, as the ropes brought up taut. Then both ropes would droop under water as if they had parted—and one wondered. Had the dinghy broken adrift, it would very likely have gone over the flats where we could not follow, and thus have been irrecoverable until picked up by some fisherman as a prize. The possibility spoiled the sail.

Evening was approaching more rapidly than the Chapman. The pile-lighthouse stood up there over the bows, and we barely appeared winning towards it at all. The wind seemed strong enough, judging by the steep sea which it was scooping out, but it was only a match for the tide by a narrow margin. Barges in dozens were beating seaward

and away; and one or two, on the edge of Blyth Sand opposite, were, like us, trying to slip up over the ebb. They did no better; they remained abreast, almost stationary, like ourselves.

Sunset came, a broad bank of copper sky over the bows, and against it the Chapman Light shone red, for we were in the red sector, out of the fairway. The unceasing progress of steamships up and down, but mainly down, was maintained; only now the ships ceased to appear as dark hulls, with a bow wave coldly white in front and a great blur of dark smoke astern; they were now a pattern of coloured light. Our own side-lights were in position, and so we still crept onward. It was night.

At last the Chapman shone white and was solidly hauled abeam and fairly passed. But it was a Pyrrhic victory. There was no hope of making Hole Haven, and the wind was not as firm and dependable now. We would stop. We therefore hauled wind for a moment, and two rapid boards whirled us below the Chapman again, and into the red sector. The lead located the edge of the banks, and the anchor was let go.

When, after supper in the bright cabin below, we lounged on deck to watch the lights of the steamer traffic in the dark, I took a sounding. It should by computation have been just about low water then, and the sounding indicated a depth of about six inches of water below the keel. The position for anchorage had been hit off to a nicety. As we began to swing with the rising tide, we turned in for the night.

V

SMOKE AND GLITTER ON THE MEDWAY

"'LAND hazed-in, fine weather,' that's what the fellows tell me, down Whitstable-way."

Under the sunshine, I looked in the direction of Whitstable as I spoke, but it was lost in haze. The blue sea sparkled, and a blur of mist softened the Sheppey landfall sunward. The Whitstable coast-line was invisible.

The ebb tide which had been contrary was nearly spent, and we should soon be sliding Thames-ward. The Spile Buoy was close beside, and the shoal lay submerged to north of us—a treacherous shallow. Even with topsails set to the easterly breeze, the yacht had been making but slow work of it. Still it was wonderful weather; slow or not, with unclouded blue sky and smooth blue sea, this was perfection of summer morning.

"Steam has the pull over us to-day," my companion commented, as, lounging full-length on deck, we watched the shipping. Half-a-dozen steamers, a few tramps and a liner were shaping course for the Nore and London. To the beat of the thud-thud-thud of the propeller, faintly heard, one could see the water thrashed, foaming in the

sunlight, from stern of the nearest; the sunshine was full upon them all.

"We won't cut the corner round the end of the Spit, there's that Cheney Beacon. Not a sign of it, of course, but the stump is waiting for us somewhere under water. I've only seen it once. But it's there."

She was slipping through the water now. The tide had turned in her favour, and the north-easterly wind was freshening every moment. She was between the two rows of channel-buoys that lead to the Medway; the mainsheet had been eased off and she was running free.

My companion jerked his thumb aft. "That little scut of a steamer astern," he said, "when will she overhaul us, think?"

Belching out black smoke, an ugly tramp was following, with a fine bow wave rolling back from her bluff bows. She was not far astern.

"When will she pass us? Not just yet. It's a clinking breeze that the tide has brought. Hanged if we're not holding our own."

The yacht was fairly humming. A larger steamer, with a stacked deck-cargo of wood, had just rounded to the tide and let go her anchor. We slipped past her at close-quarters, and she towered above; her hull was disfigured with red paint in patches, unseemly and misplaced. The little tramp was still keeping her distance astern.

We gave Garrison Point a berth, by reason of a regular out-set along that shore, constant at all states of the tide. An old bargemaster had told me of it;

wizened and knowledgeable, he stood by his shrouds, and thrust his tobacco deeper into the bowl of a dirty clay pipe. The hand that had twisted the plug was battered mahogany.

"Yuss," he had said, "there was fower of us come down, and brought up theer. Tide still a-runnin' in, and we all come away, all in a bunch, in a manner o' speakin'. They stood too fer out, an' fund the full flood agin 'em; there weren't much wind, not much there weren't, and the tide a-flowin' in, springs."

He paused and reflected, and a shadow of a smile flickered drily over a face that was all brown creases. "Oh, they got out all right, *er*course they did, on'y I couldn't barely see 'em astarn when I'd fetched the Street Buoy."

"You kept close to the Point, Sheerness side?" I reminded him.

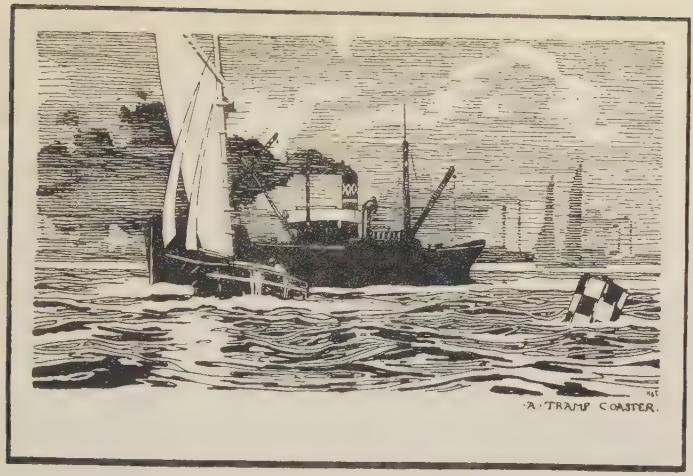
"*Close*," he replied, and he solemnly spat over the side. "*Close*," he repeated; "I sez to my mate, 'There's piles along o' this 'ere aside o' us; feel that, Tom? I've stood a thought close, *that's one on 'em*.' Grazed it, like. It didn't do us not a mite of hurt. *Close?* Yes, yes, an' fust out an' charnse it. Ole Sam, 'e come 'long in that there ole *Mermaid* when we bring up, an' 'Bill,' 'e sez, 'we allowed you wur up th' beach up along. We see yer.' And I back answered him, same 's I tell ye. 'Ginger,' I sez, 'if so be you wants to slip out quick-like Lunnon River way, *you follow them wot knows*.'"

He chuckled at recollection of it; and the yacht

to-day, following the advice of "them wot knows," gave Garrison Point a berth and sailed in on the Port Victoria side. Port Victoria was denuded of yachts, and Queenborough of packet-boats, but the Medway was a rusty museum of superannuated ships of war, and Stangate Creek—as we passed its entrance—was seen to be just as bad. There is a weirdness, a sorrow and solemnity about Stangate Creek, where these derelicts of the late war, rusted and uncomely, are rotting. Hundreds of French prisoners from the Napoleonic wars, who died in captivity, were buried on the low shore, and the tides came to break their rest. The strong salt water flowed up and, worming its way into their graveyard, searched out the coffins and washed them into the Creek. Poor dead fellows, they were outcast even in death.

Among the towering hulls, moored along the main river, we scudded. The series of them seemed endless. And heedful sailing was demanded, where this following wind was buffeted back and diverted from the floating ramparts. An accidental gybe (with topsail set and with this weight of wind) might be serious. We had to gybe her half-a-dozen times, with due heed and preparation, in order to be safe.

"Them ole hulks a-clutterin' up the fairway?" It was a grey-bearded bargemaster who had spoken, and I recalled his words to-day. "Wot, us chaps don't like 'em? Doubt it's all one to *us*. Allers dodgin' under someb'dy's starn or a-crossin' thart his bows. All one to us, same 's that."



"All in the day's work?" I suggested.

"Ay. Funny ole day's work too," he responded with a twinkle; but there his recollections branched away into irrelevance, and tended to amusement rather than to profit. They are spared accordingly.

Here, as elsewhere in the case of our invasion from the sea, one is following in the white wake of the Danish marauders and the banner of the Dannebrog. If the ages had fallen a-dreaming and the clock gone back, then out of this mist might have quickened those evil galleys of the pagan. Ahead of us—on a clear Medway—might be the "black hulls, gilded poops, and vanes and beak-heads," and the flashing oars that glinted in the sunlight; one might catch the echo of that dreaded "Yuch-hey-saa-saa"—war-song of the Vikings of the North. Rochester shut

its gates—wisely—at sight of them. The "pagans" ramped and raged, and then settled down to a siege; and woe worth the city when they enter. But one night they caught rumour of happenings afoot. It was like that ghostly "noise of chariots and of horses, even the noise of a great host." Alfred was upon them; and, like the Syrians of old, they fled; they fled in the dawn-twilight. They abandoned everything that they had captured—horses, prisoners and all—and were away seaward into the dawn, with shields and banners a little the worse for wear, and never a shred of booty. Rochester was saved.

But the Danes were not the last invaders whose tracks we follow in this blue water. When first I heard of the Medway—and I was a very small tousle-headed ruffian at a dame-school then—I heard of the "Dutch" in the same breath. I had to give a subsequent account of it, and, my landfalls being hazy, I sent the broad-sterned Dutchmen round the Land's End to Liverpool River. After the summary fashion of those days, I was rapped over the knuckles and kept in. Alone in the classroom, expiating my offence, I forlornly wished that the Dutchmen had stayed at home.

The inhabitants of Gillingham in their own day might have echoed my sorrowful wish. For at Gillingham it was that some of the Dutchmen landed, after having demolished its "fortress." Out of four or five "bad old guns" only two could be fired, and the parapet was so weak that half of it came down with the first Dutch ball. The Dutchmen were not unduly hampered.

When ashore, however, they were very virtuous Dutchmen, who neither plundered houses nor burned them. They picked up a few removables and went off, and they were very benefactors as compared with English soldiery, who, following after, plundered brutally right and left. As the Medway boatman said to Pepys afterwards, our own soldiers were far more terrible to those people of the country towns than the Dutch themselves.

At Upnor, the Dutch expected some "hard knocks," seeing the guns pointed across the narrow river. And here let old Macfarlane take up the parable :—

"But when this battery began to play upon them, its fire excited laughter and derision rather than alarm; for the ball which had been collected did not fit the bore of the guns; some of the guns were honeycombed; some of their carriages were rotten, and only four cannons could be used at all, and these so badly loaded as to be of no use."

It is said that many of our own sailors were among the enemy's crews, and were jeering at the second Charles's wonderful artillery. Moreover, the Dutch had only negotiated the Medway boom through the treachery of an English prisoner. The times, following the Restoration, were out of joint. Charles II, in his triumphal progress to London, had stopped and feasted at Rochester, and had been cheered to the echo; there were flags and flowers and bonfires; but to-night the townsmen sat glumly, and were looking back at the iron days of

Cromwell and the victories of Blake. They had little use at the moment for fripperies and flowers.

Then the same evening, "the very night the Dutch burned our ships, the King did sup with my Lady Castlemaine at the Duchess of Monmouth's, and they were all mad in the hunting of a poor moth." Touching affairs of State, he was like Gallio, "he cared for none of these things." And Macaulay's resolute English does justice to his heroic rôle: "the Dutch cannon startled an effeminate tyrant in his own palace, and the conquests which had been won by Cromwell were sold to pamper the harlots of Charles."

But those Dutchmen have carried us in advance of our schedule. The yacht had by this time romped up Ket Hole Reach, and had skirted past the Mussel Bank; and then—between the granite forts of Darnett and Hoo, built by Palmerston—we took in the topsail. We were approaching the narrower waters, and it was time to reduce sail and speed.

That ugly little tramp steamer, which had been following just astern of us as we approached Sheerness, had kept her station astern of us all the way up. Clearly we had not lost time on the passage. It was only when we shortened sail that she began to thrash smokily alongside and then gradually ahead, and finally gave us her wash. Her inexhaustible smoke went with her, the wind being fair.

Gillingham, which—when James I was king—was "where the King's ships do lie," was over the

port bow, under a pall of smoke. This was not the smoke of that tramp steamer, but of strictly local origin. Coming as we did out of sunlit air, the smoke of Gillingham was like a London fog. Gillingham with its cherry orchards was a fairer place when James I's high-pooped ships of war rode to their "ankers" in Gillingham and Pinup Reaches. For one thing, they had cheerful ideas of ship-painting in those days: hulls, not then monotonously black, would be picked out with splendid colour. With blue upper-works and bright yellow sides they would glisten in the sun, the towering poops scrolled and carved.

"Git yer bearin's in a fog, 'long o' the whiff of it," said an old fellow from a sprit-sail barge, speaking of the modern Medway.

"Arming your lead?" I asked. (The lead can be "armed" with grease when sounding, so as to bring up samples of the quality of the bottom. It is not an unknown thing for expert pilots in some places to be able to find their way literally thus by smell of the sea-bottom.)

"No." He dismissed it with a grin. "C'ment there, brickyards yonder," and he waved expressive arms, "muck-heaps an' all jes' round the Point. Don't I tell yer? See."

Short Reach brought us to Cockham Woods and Upnor Castle, and past Chatham we wormed our way up.

Rochester Bridge forbids further progress to vessels with fixed masts, and has so done through the centuries. Its position gave it great strategic

·DUTCH IN THE·MEDWAY.

importance, and when Henry I conferred a fourth of its tolls on a favourite "whether the bridge was whole or broken," he perhaps meant to put a premium on keeping it "whole." King John, who generally inclined to mischief, tried to smash it up when he came this way; Simon de Montfort, half a century later, set it on fire; and (about twenty years later still) the frost and river-ice cracked it, and the tide finally carried it away to sea. Then the masons came and built another; and later on—during an invasion panic—it was "beaten down" by the townsfolk themselves. And so the history went on. Bridge has succeeded bridge, and when the present one was being erected, the piles of a Roman bridge which had been before them all were

discovered. Many of these piles were in such good preservation that they were actually used again.

Those great stakes, surely and deeply as they were driven into the mud of Rochester River, are driven yet more surely and deeply into the mysteries of the past. All the pageantry of all the ages is gone like a dream, and here these water-sodden piles remain, unchanged. What hands were they and what engines were those which drove the black piles home? The sturdy-limbed Roman fellows, perhaps, swarmed over the job like a bevy of modern British workmen might, and when they knocked off for lunch, the only difference between the two gangs was that the Romans had no pipes to put a light to.

It was an important Roman highway that the bridge was keeping open, but whether there was any substantial Roman fortress is not known. The Romans seldom neglected a key position, and the Conqueror certainly did not. Although the city had been "so inconsiderable, of itself, in the days of the Confessour, that it was only estimated at the small sum of five pounds," it soon ceased from its low estate when the great Norman keep was upstanding, with barbican, fortalice, moat and all. The countryside trembled.

Odo, the Conqueror's "bastard brother," lorded it mightily here in his lace and ermine. Churchman though he was (Bishop of Bayeux in Normandy), he was not seriously afflicted with a churchman's scruples. He plundered unashamed, "no one daring to oppose him," for a man with Rochester Castle and its garrison at his back was not a person

to argue with. They simply watched him drive the cattle off or empty the best barn, and stood by and looked as if they liked it. The Saxons knew perfectly well, from gaunt experience,

> "Theirs not to make reply,
> Theirs not to reason why."

Tongues might be torn out, and pincers, red-hot, were available for flaying. These things were not spoken of: daylight was unknown inside the Norman dungeon and it kept its own secrets.

But they probably chuckled in their sleeves, when Odo himself was marched off and locked up in some grim fortress over in Normandy.

Sailing down again, we let go our anchor and brought up for a short time beside the picturesque Cockham Woods. The sails were furled and we lounged in sunshine and looked about us.

"You ain't a-stayin' long? All mud there, come ebb."

That genial voice bellowed from a barge, the great brown sails of which were close above us as she passed. It was courteously put, and a friendly act. He warned, but was careful not to impute or presume ignorance. Though in rough-hewn phrase, it was the essence of courtesy.

"Away this tide; thanks all the same."

He spun the spokes of his wheel, and the barge bore up and slid by.

The sun was bright upon the wooded hillside, but to southward of us, away beyond the long stone wall, was smoke and distant noise of Chatham

SMOKE AND GLITTER

dockyard. What one wanted then is what William Morris wanted in the case of London :

> " Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
> Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
> Forget the spreading of the hideous town ;
> Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
> And dream of London, small and white and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green."

Change London into Rochester and Thames into Medway, and there you have it. Rochester would be there, small and white and clean, with its ancient bridge under which these same tides flowed and ebbed.

There would be the gabled mediæval streets, the cobbled ways, the crazy lamps. And here, furred and cloaked, might be the cavalcade of Henry VIII with runners in slashed hose busy to and fro. Holbein's portrait of Anne of Cleves had shown so winsome a girl that bluff Harry had fallen in love. Hither he rode, composed and kingly and imperious to the outward eye, but actually quite on the tiptoe of expectation. He thought her lovely, and she was here at Rochester. He came out from the low-ceiled carven room foaming with rage; he swore in his red Tudor passion that they had brought him a Flanders mare. He ground his teeth, he stamped his feet, his attendants fled for their lives. It was not a merry Christmas for some of them. But before he left Rochester, he had so far relented as to buy the good German lady a " suit of sables for a new year's gift."

Bluff King Hal had the gift of personal rudeness

when he chose, but it was policy for most people to look pleasant even then. The headsman, with black mask and two-handed axe, was never far away; and where the head of a queen had fallen at the scaffold, the heads of most of us might feel a trifle loose upon our shoulders when Harry's kingly face began to redden, and his eyes to smoulder.

Here as we lay at anchor, the blue water was still rising, and the tide flowing landward to Rochester Bridge and the heart of Kent. Pity is it we cannot keep our cities "white and clean" to the outward eye, even if they cease to be "small." All this smoke defacing the blue sky over Chatham and Rochester gives a widely different character to the Medway valley from that of the old cherry orchards and bordering gardens when Rochester was "small and white." Queen Elizabeth with her Court visited that same Rochester, and courtier exquisites, men with slender rapiers and preposterous ruffs and flowered cloaks, were here. Airily they possessed Rochester streets, supercilious gallants, aloof from the hodden townsfolk. The Queen had come to see the progress of the "Queene's Shippes" on the stocks at Chatham, or (swinging to tide just here where the yacht was anchored at this moment) the "shippes of Warr lying at anker and moored there." Here they would lie, with this same tide at flood and ebb chattering round their cables, and making them yaw gently to and fro when Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Anjou boarded. Here came the gaunt Queen, stiff as her own starched ruff, elaborate

·ROCHESTER.

in all her quiltings and broideries, and the bevy of courtiers buzzed in her wake, scented and bejewelled, fine figures in damask and velvet.

It has all gone, and here to-day was only the prosaic modern Medway, and the little work-a-day yacht sheered and swung, while the tide cluttered and chuckled round her straining cable. Smoke, that drifted from furnace and factory, made a thin brownish haze over the sky, and invaded even those sunlit slopes and woods of Cockham. Upnor Castle peered over the shoulder of high ground. Upnor, contemptible to the Dutch invaders, had long ago been a boyhood home of Drake. Frankie

Drake, the boy ashore, hungrily watched the shipping in this Medway, and

> " The black wharves and the slips,
> And the sea-tides tossing free ;
> And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
> And the beauty and mystery of the ships."

It fed that passion of his for sea-adventure. Here came the tall carracks from the grey unknown sea-ways ; here came the high-pooped King's ships with their floating pennons. And the boy watched and waited. After he had sailed the *Golden Hind* round the world, perhaps some time when he sailed up to Greenwich, he looked up the Medway before he had hauled the Noure buoy abeam, and thought of boyhood days at Upnor.

And Drake (he of all men) must have turned in his grave when the Dutch invaders were up past the Ket Hole Reach, and the Duke of Albemarle was at Gravesend " with a great many idle Lords and Gentlemen, with their pistols and fooleries," but there were no ships and no sailors to make real answer to the Hollanders. London, had de Ruyter but known it, lay naked and open to him. When King's ships were burned and captured in the Medway, it was time that Drake should " quit the port of heaven " and use the Dutchmen as he used the Dons. Drake—in his own words—had the Spaniards of his own day " beaten and shuffled together." When the Armada was in the Channel, he ranged up alongside one huge galleon, and Don Pedro de Valdez struck his flag at once when he

heard the name of his assailant. And here, under the guns of Upnor, was an invader unrepulsed and triumphant in Drake's own Medway.

Anchored at edge of the fairway, we had been drinking tea in the cabin, and lounging in comfortable idleness. But suddenly that stone wall on the Chatham side, as seen through the porthole, appeared alarmingly nearer, and its rough mortared stones were moving past us rapidly.

"She's dragging, fast!"

We tumbled on deck in an instant. Surely enough, she had dragged her anchor; and the tide and strong wind were setting her fast and straight upon a crowded little posse of anchored craft. The anchor was not holding; the yacht was swirling upstream, broadside-on, out of control. She *must* foul something. One of us was hauling that useless cable angrily hand over hand, and the other with resolute despatch was getting the mainsail on her. A large anchored motor-boat, with a glass tramcar superstructure, was just beside us, and the water round us was eddying in little whirlpools as our inert sluggish hull slowly answered the helm. The two ships were almost fouled; I could have reached out my hand and touched that motor-boat. But we were on the wind, and hung stopped—dead still for a long moment. Then the yacht gathered gradual way and slid by, with barely a hand's breadth between her fender and the motor-boat, and clawed gradually off. She was again under control, and had got away without a graze. Paint and pride were untouched.

"Near enough, that," I grinned in relief, "but now we've got her going we'll keep her at it."

The tea, below there in the cabin, was getting cold in the pot, and it continued to do so, for we were busy in this narrow waterway, making board for board on a lee-going tide. It was nearly high water.

Entering Gillingham Reach, we hugged the shore of the Hoo Salt Marshes, and a barge hove in sight at the corner, running free, and romping up-river.

"She doesn't give us much room, she'll put us ashore if she's not careful."

Bargemasters are usually considerate, and we, being close-hauled, had the right of way of her. But it would be a near thing. We slipped up towards her, a few yards only apart, for it was too late for any change of tactics. We were right beside her, and there was sudden panic and scuffle on board. A man darted off to the wheel. Something forward had interested the crew for a moment, and the barge was roaring up with a great bone in her teeth of white foam, innocent for the time being of helmsman or look-out! We were past, and the faithless helmsman looked over his shoulder at us as we drew rapidly apart, with a sheepish grin on his rough-tanned face.

The low sun gilded everything. The warm banks, and the anchored shipping and the brown-sailed barges on the blue water—every object was picked out and modelled and glorified. We beat to and fro, gaining gradual way seaward. As we passed Gillingham, a stumpy barge was getting

under way; she stood right in over the Copperhouse Marshes, all in among the cropping green islets, and then made one long bee-line of a straight board through Bartlett and Half Acre Creeks and down Ket Hole Reach right up to the Stoke Saltings and well-nigh to Port Victoria itself. We preferred to thread to and fro, to and fro across the recognized channel among the anchored ships. Short cuts across marshes at high water, for those not "locally acquainted," are apt to lead to a long pause, and an undignified night-berth on the mud. Also, if the tides are taking off, the berth may easily be for many more nights than one.

At sundown, the easterly wind began to search through us; coats were donned and collars turned up. With side-lights in position we continued to thread between the great dark anchored hulls

(derelicts that made weird grinding noises at their great chains) and the lighted and living river-traffic. The coloured channel-buoys flicked and glittered, and kept us comfortably informed of the deep water. Here a small steamer, blurred in the gloom, would thresh by and give us her wash; here a barge, with her dark sails outlined on the wan sky, would slide quickly past. Rows on rows of serried pin-point golden lights glittered on the shores and were here and there caught up and returned by the wash of the dead-blue water. Night had gradually stolen upon us.

Ordinarily if a really snug night-anchorage is desired, Queenborough is the place. That double bend of the West Swale just above it affords weather-shores for all winds, and there is little night traffic. But, as we hoped to be under way at turn of the tide soon after dawn, we would bring up off Port Victoria.

The wind had fallen lighter, but the ebb tide was without pause or hesitation. Having dropped a little further down in the dark than we had intended, we found it slow work sailing up over the strong run of the ebb. But before long the anchor was down, and so also were we.

Dawn came, but not departure. There was an immense stillness, and every object about us was lost in mist. One could barely see from stern to stem of the yacht. The fog-horn on Garrison Point was bleat-bleating recurrently, and the distant note of the Nore could be heard away to the northward. The good tide which should have taken us to Brightlingsea was already beginning to slide away sea-

ward; and here we lay, blind, inert, isolated and islanded in a pall of dull grey cloud. We dared not move, because the tide would sweep us athwart obstructions before we could see them, and we should be helpless. But we agreed that, as soon as visibility was sufficiently good to afford us a glimpse of Garrison Point, we would risk it: we could not see our tide running to utter waste like this.

Sheerness, away there in the mist, is a thriving busy place enough now with its town and dockyard, but it has not the antiquity of Chatham. The Domesday Book in 1086 takes account of Rocestre vel Rocule, Ceteham and Gelingham, but "Shirness" and "Quinborough" (as they figure on the early charts) were then but grassy wastes; their site was only a stretch of marsh and foreshore.

The fog-bells rang from shipping at anchor, and now and again those regular blasts from Garrison Point and the Nore were perioded by a hoarse growl from some steamer under way. The fog was gradually lifting, the shape of Garrison Point at last showed as a greyer blur upon the grey. The anchor was broken out, and sail set in faith, hoping for wind. The tide carried us out into pale obscurity; the veils fell about us; channel-buoys materialized out of the curdled white. The shore was lost; the sound of Garrison Point grew less deep, and that of the Nore fuller. By this time I was towing in the dinghy, and we were ready to anchor if we lost touch with the fairway. Then the yacht began to gain upon me; faintly, faintly, a little bow ripple was seen—she was sailing! I

was soon back on board, and she was headed by compass for the Nore, still unseen. Then the Light Vessel at last took shape in the mist.

The boy was grinding the wheel that works the fog-horn, and he grinned the friendly grin of boyhood as we passed close by. The mist was lifting. Fog-horns from Garrison Point, from the Nore and the Mouse were all droning, and fog-horns and bells from shipping. Very contentedly, in the faint breeze, we laid course for the Mouse. The fog-bell at the Maplin and the fog-horn of the Swin Middle were still sounding as we passed them by at 12.30 and 2.0 respectively. Then the sun came out and shone, scorchingly hot in the quiet air. The Barrow Sands uncovered at dead low water beside us, sunlit yellow. Then the tide turned, but—with our topsails set—the wind was sufficient to carry us gradually over the flood. After sending us quietly through the Spitway, the wind began to pipe up strongly and it was a wet job for me out on the bowsprit getting in the jib topsail. In a strong wind we brought up off Brightlingsea just before six in the evening, and the last tier was soon on the mainsail. We were ready to make full amends for the interrupted tea-party of yesterday.

VI

THAMES MOUTH IN A GREY EVENING

IT was a cloudy afternoon, and, except that a single shaft of sunshine lit up those earth cliffs of Warden Point, the Isle of Sheppey was soberly hued and dull. The gleam vanished and left it all grey.

Beating slowly towards "Lunnon River," close-hauled to a westerly wind, the yacht was past the Girdler, by way of the Prince's Channel.

"Lots of shipping in evidence this afternoon; it's sometimes oddly secluded, considering the amount of traffic in and out. To-day's by way of balancing things up."

Apart from Whitstable "yawls" to southward, and a fleet of Leigh bawleys near at hand, there were half-a-dozen barges beating London-ward, and a few were running free for the Foreland. Solid hulls and heavy smoke-clouds of great steamers were everywhere. Here in the Oaze Deep they were shaping course for the Nore and London; and, further away, the ships were hull-down, or were so low on the sea-line as hardly to be visible unless the long blur of horizon smoke declared them. One yellow-funnelled passenger

steamer was furrowing up astern, with that flat-flat-flat sound of paddle-wheels already audible, though to leeward.

All of us who were thus navigating our vessels securely among the shoals might well afford to "thank with brief thanksgiving" those "goodly-disposed men" who in the reign of King John set themselves seriously to suppress the evil-disposed. Evil-disposed persons were bringing ships to destruction by showing forth of false beacons. The goodly-disposed did more than merely discourage false beacons: they appointed true ones. They forgathered at Deptford, and handed on their traditions. So Trinity House came into being.

Henry VIII incorporated an existing Society of Mariners; he did not found it. According to a later statute in 1565 the Brethren were to

"Make, erect and set up such and so many beacons, marks and signs for the sea, in such place or places of the sea-shores and uplands near the sea coasts or forelands of the sea, only for seamarks, as to them shall seem most meet, needful and requisite, whereby the dangers may be avoided and escaped, and ships the better come into their ports without peril."

In the estuary of the Thames, a generous array of "beacons, marks and signs" has seemed "meet, needful and requisite"; and, with their guidance, the port can be entered "without peril." Therefore the pilots of to-day, who are put on board every vessel of any size approaching the Thames, have a

· NEARING · THE · NORE. ·

greatly easier task than their predecessors in the days of history. The fairways are now generously buoyed and lighted, besides being meticulously charted. Two or three hundred years ago the charts were vague, the seamarks few, and the lights were none.

Close-hauled, the yacht was thrashing through a lumpy grey sea. Sometimes the fringe of a wave, meeting her bows, would be ripped to tatters and driven over us in a horizontal shower of drenching salt spray. Steeply moulded and inclined to top, each wave of the little turbulent seaway would hit her bows with a *thud*, and then rebound in a scurry of foam upon the waves that followed. But the

sea was good-tempered, and green water rarely came aboard; the yacht staggered and toppled a little as she kept edging to windward on the cross-seas, but she forged solidly on, and the Nore Light Vessel was palpably nearer each time that her helm was put down and she went about.

A suspicion of ill-weather, a smell of storm on the wind, does not always exhilarate. When, as now, the day is verging towards nightfall, it is apt to be a subject for uneasy speculation. But not so to-night. The glass was certainly falling, and the last suspicion of sunlight had long been quenched. Bulging slate-grey clouds followed one another in close procession over the sky, and the sea was dirty green fringed with dirty white. Five miles to windward, under close-layered black cloud, with a paler sky behind, the town of Sheerness was silhouetted in dead black. Every building and church stood outlined in dark solidity.

Promise of ill-weather seemed assured from the sky signs; but, having Queenborough and Hole Haven available to windward, and the East Swale to lee, we were perfectly serene. And the event proved that the weather had no real wickedness in hiding for us. This was a transient whiff of ill-humour only; no real outburst of rage and murder was portended.

Here as elsewhere, however, the murderous moods are not unknown. Especially wicked is the north-east wind, and its doings are often unrecorded. When some great ship is wrecked at sea and many lives are in peril, the newspaper wires are naturally

alive with it, and their columns teem with detail. But the drama may be just as vital in the unreported case of some sprit-sail barge with a crew of two.

It was at 10.15 p.m. one dark night that the Nore Light Vessel was firing distress signals, and reported having seen flares to westward. The Southend life-boat put out at once. A strong north-easter was sending in an ugly breaking sea; the flares had ceased, and the life-boat groped anxiously about in the dark along the fringes of the shoal for an hour or more. Nothing could be found. There was only the night and the wind roaring overhead, and the white-crested steep waves roaring shoreward under it. The ship had gone. Finally, however, the Southend men found the heeling masthead of a Rochester barge, alone visible above the dark water, and two cold and dripping men clinging to it. The ship itself was down-under, gone. "With great difficulty owing to the wind and tide," they succeeded in rescuing the two hands.

It is sometimes anxious work enough among these shoals in bad weather, well buoyed and charted as they are. In earlier days it must have been a place of nightmare for a stranger. And local pilots, well as they knew their waters, took great care to keep their knowledge to themselves. The doctrine of the old Guild which preceded Trinity House had been that the channels of our own coasts should be kept profoundly secret. The pilots alone should know them: like the knowledge possessed by other Guilds, the matter was their "mystery." This policy, they thought, had the

double virtue of making pilotage for strangers compulsory, and of keeping any hostile fleet in wholesome dread of our defensive shoalwaters.

And now our little modern yacht, pounding through the grey water, was gradually weathering the Nore. Her bowsprit, pointing now above the horizon and now well below it, registered her long pitch as she rode up the cross-wave, and flopped down the other side. Every sheet was as tight as a fiddle-string, and the wet wind sang through the rigging.

Here again was the old Nore Light Vessel, abeam across the lumpy grey sea. It is by a long way the oldest-established lightship of these waters. Since 1732 there has been a light at this spot; before that the " Noure " buoy had sufficed. The end of that tongue of shoal has probably been marked for centuries.

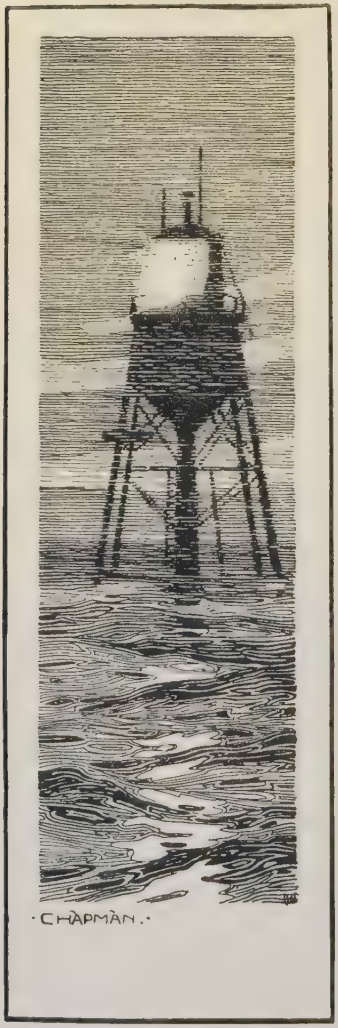
With or without seamarks, the local pilot could be trusted, but not so the ordinary navigator. The latter is " all at sea " as soon as he loses them.

So, therefore, when the mutiny at the Nore occurred in 1797, and Whitehall feared that the malcontents in possession might sail the fleet over to the enemy, a shrewd plan was hit upon. There lay the King's ships, anchored off the Nore, and the gaudy delinquents in possession could lord it on the quarter-deck, with never a King's officer to say them nay. But just then, quietly enough, Trinity House got to work. All buoys and beacons were removed, and all seamarks destroyed. How this was managed, right under the noses of those

tarry mutineers, is not recorded, but perhaps the crews were just then busy knocking the necks off the wine-bottles and carousing in the captain's cabin. They were also making a cheap show of a loyal-hearted bosun with a halter round his neck. The poor fellow saved his life in the end by pleading that—when he had enforced discipline—he had done it by order of those above him and not on his own account. At all events the work of moving the buoys was carried through, and the fleet was in this way locked in. The men dared not handle it, blindfold among the shoals; the spirit of mutiny gradually left them and the mutineers came to a better mind. Within a week they had surrendered (though one ship was in rank mutiny still while actually sailing up to receive the King's pardon), and the ringleader (Parker) was taken ashore at Sheerness and executed.

It was well enough for Trinity House, in a case of national emergency, to destroy seamarks, but other people are not allowed to take liberties. Penalties have long been reserved for the offence.

In times past, retribution and crime have not always corresponded. To be hung by the neck until one is dead, for theft of a sheep, for instance, seems to us expiation out of all reason. So also, in this very River Thames of ours, were the pains reserved for the offence of using the "kiddle." The kiddle was a stake-net, which caught the fish coming with the tide, and you were clearly told by authority that you must not use it. If, while you were setting your stakes and trying to catch fish one dark night,



you happened to get caught yourself, your gear was naturally enough confiscated and burnt, but the really uncomfortable part of the business was yet in reserve. Positively you had incurred the extreme pain of excommunication, which is a prospect to daunt the hardiest. It is bad enough to lose one's nets and stakes in this life, but sentence of everlasting perdition in the next is quite another matter. For the sake of a few fish, the game was hardly worth the candle.

But those were the summary methods of the days of King John (and he, worthy man, although he is not known to have used the kiddle, managed to get himself excommunicated in the end all the same). When, however, we come to " the spacious days of

great Elizabeth," we are more civilized in the assessments of the penal code. The penalty for destroying a seamark (just as if it were an offence against a good-rule bye-law of an Urban District Council now) was a fine; but failure to pay the fine involved outlawry. The latter penalty is precisely the one that fits the offence, and might well have been provided at the outset: an action which endangers large numbers of the community should be visited in exactly that fashion. And so, for once, one wishes vindictively to tune up the old penal code to a more trenchant note. No tempering of the wind in this flagrant instance.

With her cloud of black smoke driving ahead of her, the *Batavier* packet-steamer was forging seaward through the grey water, bound for Rotterdam; London-ward, from every channel, from the Swin, the Barrow Deep, the Prince's Channel, the shipping was converging on the Nore, and thrashing up Thames-ward. One after another, the great cargo-steamers, low in the water, came forcefully and imperturbably along their straight course, rolling back the grey broken water into a deep swathe of foam. The yacht crossed and recrossed the tossing white water of their tracks as she turned doggedly to windward, and Shoeburyness was now abeam. Beyond it lay Southend, with its long pier, a dim perspective of grey townland.

Southend is a great place now, but the old chart of 1688 has no knowledge of it. It *was* not. "Lee," Prittlewell, and "Shoobery" are there, but no Southend. Three centuries before that

again, "Shoubery" (as it then was) had its own importance, but Southend and Westcliff were green fields and their sole inhabitants were browsing sheep. At Shoubery there stood a beacon, and watchers were told off to stand beside it, on permanent look-out for the enemy. If the hostile galleys were espied worming their way secretly through the grey twilight, these men were to set on fire their beacon, "and make besides all the noise by horn and by cry that they can make." It is a long way from their horn-blowings and halloings to the silent wireless station of the present day.

Our insular security has never been proof against raids, as the late war again showed; serious invasion has met with no success for nearly nine hundred years, but Dutchmen and Frenchmen and Germans have all in turn troubled our home-waters to our annoyance and sorrow. Not only in war time, moreover, might there be foreign marauders here, and the limit of impertinence was reached when French pirates very nearly kidnapped an English King of ours right under our very noses off the Nore. The King was Henry IV, who happened to be crossing from Queenborough to Leigh; and his peril was all due, as the chronicler contemptuously says, to his ship being "*but a slug*." The pirates were outpacing him fast, and one can imagine the shipmen in their long coats of coarse falding as they gaped back at the lessening track of broken water between, while the men-at-arms were computing the distance of bow-shot. But, slug though she was, the King's ship managed

to enter Leigh roadstead first; and the pirates, jabbering unintelligibly, hauled their wind and turned seaward again.

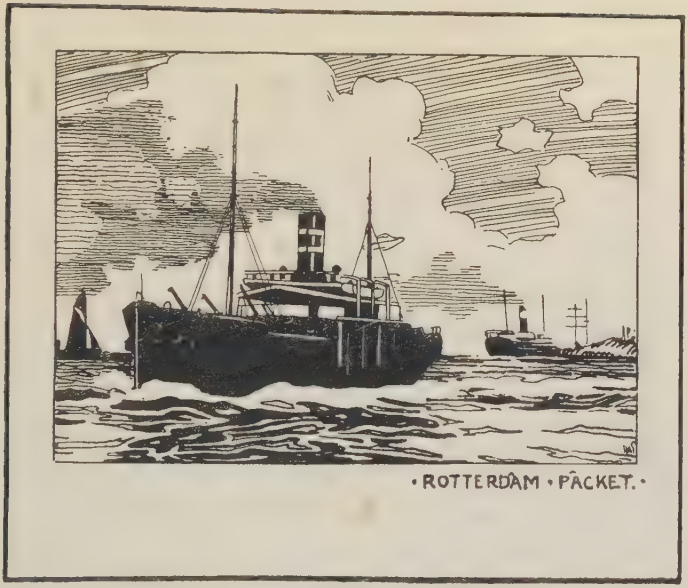
We also went about off Leigh Middle, two miles off-shore. The tide was helping us; the great body of water was moving imperceptibly but mightily up towards London Bridge; the whole broken tossing grey surface was really swirling London-wards, although its waves, wind-driven, seemed going the other way as they bobbered and toppled and foamed in the familiar scurry of wind against tide. Slop slop, slop, the yacht came over them; then the bowsprit curved in its course, sweeping along the horizon-line of grey land, while the sails flapped and the blocks rattled. Then the bows pointed again, and the sails went to sleep as the yacht lay over, and slop, slop, slop, again she lifted and bumped over these turbulent waves as she headed for the Blyth Sand.

Leigh, early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, was described as "a very proper place where commonly tall ships do ride." The description has ceased to hold good. It is not that Leigh is now necessarily improper, but the tall ships have certainly vanished: the sturdy carracks with tall fore-castle and stern-castle, square head-sail and lateen mizen, they have gone; the tall ships brightly picked out in the Tudor green, and the gay, chattering Elizabethan seamen in doublet, jerkin and trunk-hose, all have passed away into the shadows. There is no great display at the anchorage nowadays. The shrimping fleet of bawleys does indeed ride here gallantly enough

when the tide is high; but when the blue water has turned again home the ships sit down on the mud, heeling rather forlornly at various angles. In the Essex phrase, they "lust over."

The grey evening was beginning to close in; the greyness was deader, and night was rising from the North Sea. Glancing backward, towards the fading waters of the Nore astern, one could almost fancy that the clustering yards of some old-time fleet might be lined greyly against the dull sky, half-seen in the twilight. Fleets innumerable have forgathered there. After the Elizabethan ships had undergone the evolution of a century, a far more perfect sailing machine had been produced; and the ships of Prince Rupert's fleet that anchored off the Nore in 1666 were splendid models of the shipwright's craft. Workmanlike in design and character, they were also finished and decorated with a lavish hand. Rich in carved figures and gilding, their galleried sterns would tower out of the water, and the poop-lanthorns above would glisten like stars, while little tongues of light in reflection would be twisted and drifted this way and that by the washing tide below. When, with great clatter and lusty heaving and hauling next day, anchors were weighed and sail set, the fleet laid course down the Swin to drive off the Dutch who seemed likely to bombard Harwich.

That, however, must be the last glance seaward, for we were now in the Thames. The yacht thrashed more heavily in the broken water as she cleared Canvey Island, and opened the full run of



the tide along the " River Middle " line of buoys. Canvey is not unknown to fame and antiquity, for Ptolemy knew of it as Connos, and at Benfleet—up at the back of it—the Danes first landed. Probably it was a sludgy islet of little account, half-flooded at every spring-tide, until the Dutch engineers came in 1622, and reclaimed it and sea-walled it for us in good Dutch fashion. Dutchmen returned later in a less friendly rôle. When their fleet visited the Medway and Thames, they made a landing on Canvey for provisioning, for they had espied our good sturdy sheep grazing at back of the sea-walls. The vision of the stolid Dutchmen in their baggy

breeches chasing and halloing after the scattering flocks is worth conjuring. Their comrades craned anxious necks and watched from the anchored vessels their good supper stampeding in panic towards Benfleet Creek, with flying sabots and swelling breeches in pursuit.

There was once a mud-horse in mid-channel off Canvey. It is marked as buoyed on the old charts, but it has since been dredged away completely and the channel cleared.

The yacht's bowsprit, on the short "leg," was pointed at the Blyth Sand and Marshes, where a fringe of amphibious land still borders the Thames. It is a lonely and isolated part. Formerly, no doubt, the Thames banks in general were liable to submersion, and at top of the spring-tides, the grey water would be several miles wide. Partly the tides have built up the banks, and partly man has done so. Each tide leaves its "deposit," and with two tides a day for a few centuries, the deposit becomes formidable. "Little drops of water, little grains of sand," and the aggregate effect is notorious. Then man comes to give it the *coup de grâce* and consolidates the conquest with a species of railway embankment which he calls a sea-wall; and after that the spring tide stays outside and the sheep browse on the landward levels.

Sometimes, however, the spring-tide is not content to be excluded. In this Thames of ours, the spring-tide has been known to do very wicked things on dark nights, generally with that old enemy the north-east wind as accessory. Places that had

been reclaimed and embanked with careful science and years of labour have been suddenly over-run and desolated in a single night. A case in point was that of the Dagenham Marshes in the year 1707.

Away to westward the dreary sameness of cloud was parted for a moment at sundown. The great sun probed through it, sullen brick-red. An overflow of red light licked dully over the frayed cloud-edges, and then relapsed into greyness as the grim sun went under. It was a gaunt sunset, quite unlovely, but scornful, and—in some manner—imposing.

The light from the Chapman pile-lighthouse was glimpsing and going out to northward of us, and Hole Haven was still ahead, when our own side-lights were put in their brackets. One is always the soul of punctuality on the Thames: with so much traffic about, it is no place for taking liberties.

A dull haze of red lingered in the west before night set in. The harsh-looking water below it was grey, heavily grey. Smoke drifted and banked as steamer and chimney belched new volumes, smoke and more smoke, a black cloud here or a dull spreading blur on the horizon. The sense was felt of a vague perspective of masts and chimneys and steamers, and yet more steamers and chimneys and masts, dwindling into a dim obscurity of smoke, a distance of cloud and mystery. Beyond it all lay London.

And this was "London River," the great waterway to all the world. There, somewhere under the vestige of dull sunset, must lie the ancient city

itself, the primeval bridgehead, the obvious capital, the seat of kings. The lowest point upon the great tidal river where bridging was possible was bound to become a place of note. In its seaward reaches the ancient river (with those deep fringes of marsh) severed Kent and Essex with utter completeness, and no one passed save through London. And so the city of merchandise, the city of palaces of the Middle Ages, the city of a hundred spires (the city then "small and white and clean"), sprang into being. Knights in chain-mail or plate-armour or côte-hardie rattled wearily over its old bridge of houses. Men in the loose fur-fringed tunics of the Middle Ages chaffered and bartered there, while long-toed shoes shuffled over its cobbled ways; Elizabethan merchants there spoke of their ventures to the Indies. It was the stake of battle, the coveted, the beloved, the renowned. The great city is beyond the scope of this cruise, but there it lay; the sense of it was felt: London, solemn and ancient and huge, dominating the Thames.

But perhaps, as the lighted steamers came thrashing by, and the smoky twilight deepened into night, one felt just now the compelling hugeness of a great drab modern London, rather than the witchery of some white-walled mediæval city. The pageants have shone and faded like the lost sunset; and the stern, oppressive presence of modern London remains. There, under brooding coppery clouds to westward, it lay—a world in itself, with its teeming life under its thousand million lights in its myriad-storeyed buildings, its populace in drifting

SUNSET ON THE THAMES

tides on street and railway, its sublime beauty and revolting ugliness, its goodness and its unnameable wickedness. Though unseen, it was a presence possessing the twilight; the loom of it was felt to westward, like the loom of the solid land through the drift of fog at sea.

Hole Haven and the Lobster Smack Inn had dropped away astern and the petroleum reservoirs of Thames Haven were over the starboard bow. It was quite dark, and the wind, holding well, was westerly now; full in our teeth up Sea Reach, it would give us a comfortable sail without boards up the Lower Hope.

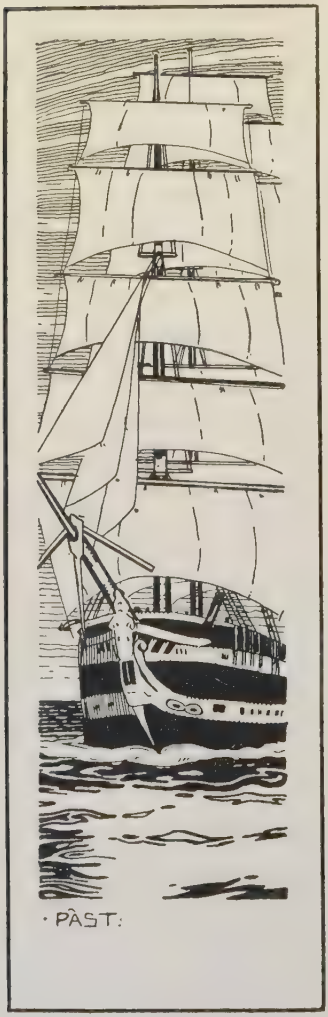
The last name has quite a poetical ring; but a Hope is really an anchorage and has nothing to do with that quality which "springs eternal." Below Gravesend is the Lower Hope, and above Gravesend is the Northfleet Hope.

A few dark-sailed barges were running free, seaward; others were brought up in the anchorage. They are in their element here, and their masters have centuries of experience behind them. Every bay and eddy is known, and the run of the tide.

"Hold on inshore this board *I* do; cheat the tide on side o' the flat and find the eddy; short board t'other side, tide run there, that do."

So they will tell you, and things innumerable beside, which are all in the day's work.

"Don't bar naught, 'ceptin' bridges," one of them added. "A bloke wot knows can have 'arf a quid to take my wheel in them places an' welcome. Tide a-runnin', an' no sail on her, same's that.



Come any ole huffler 'longside, beggared I don't say ' Git aboard, mate.' "

As we reached up the Lower Hope now, having rounded the flashing West Blyth Buoy, we were headed for the recurring light of the Ovens Spit Buoy, off East Tilbury Fort. We had touched the narrowing part of the estuary which, in the days of short-ranged ordnance, was the natural position for the outer defences of London. Round the corner, the forts of Gravesend and Tilbury were considered formidable; and when de Ruyter came sailing up the Thames (while Charles II was hunting the poor moth with the Duchess) he was not disposed to get within range of them. A fort lately erected at Gravesend appealed in particular to his imagination, though, in fact, it was probably just on a level with the

forts in the Medway which he sent staggering with a single broadside. At all events he drew his ships off, and Evelyn watched with glee "the King's ships chaceing them with broadsides to the buoy of the Nore, where the main fleete was at anker."

Other defences besides forts have been used. In the reign of Edward III, piles were driven into the river all the way across in order to prevent entry by the French fleet; and years afterwards, when Napoleon in his cocked hat was pacing the sand dunes of the Calais shore, with one hungry eye on the white cliffs of Dover, Trinity House equipped, officered and manned ten frigates and "moored them across the Thames in the Hope" for the protection of London.

Heaven knows it was well to have good defences, because raids are uncomfortable things. When lower down the Thames off Shoebury, we were calling to mind the alarm beacon of the fourteenth century; but I am afraid that on one occasion at least the men failed to get their beacon burning brightly enough or to make "all the noise by horn and by cry" that they ought to have made. At all events at some period thereabouts "certayne galayes of warre" got through. Up the river they came, with the long pulse of their banks of oars sounding in the moonless dark, and the fighting-platforms at each end of the galleys crowded with armed men, all grimly intent on mischief. After their own fashion, they fulfilled the law of their being: they "robbed, brente and slue." It was a wild night, with defenceless people rushing blindly

to escape the circles of torchlight. The torches glittered redly on fierce foreign faces and burnished weapons. The raiders had it all their own way. At "Grauysende, they brente a grete part of the towne." Besides killing, they are even recorded to have taken pressed men back with them to serve as slaves upon their galleys. It was obviously high time for the King to make a levy for the provision of barges and balingers for defence; after the event, he did it.

Level with the red light of Shorne Mead Battery, the yacht had now entered Gravesend Reach and was again turning to windward. At the moment the steamer traffic was congested; both up and down the ships were passing, with notes of sound corresponding to their size. From above the green and red lights towering aloft upon a liner outward-bound, the deep-throated bass voice would reverberate, and the smaller cargo-steamer thrashing busily London-wards would reply with a note less assured but still deep. And above and below they were toot-tooting at one another perpetually; and perpetually we were rolled and pitched on their wash that came ridging over upon us out of the lamp-jewelled darkness. We made short boards, out channel-wards and in again, going about and standing off as soon as we entered the red sector of the Shorne Mead occulting light. So we worked on to Mark Lane and Gravesend. It was midnight now.

The reaches are ancient and historied. Cabot sailed from here in 1516; and in Gravesend Reach

the Elizabethan galleons of London, yellow-hulled and high-castled, assembled to sail against the Armada. Fine gentlemen on their poops were beruffed and befeathered and belaced. At Tilbury, opposite to us, Queen Elizabeth in full armour on her white horse harangued her troops who were ready to defend London against the invader—not knowing as yet how conclusively Drake and Effingham were handling the matter at sea. Our sea-power was a heritage not then fully realized. Some years before, when Harry was King, the great *Henry Grâce à Dieu*, built at Woolwich—the greatest ship of her time—had sailed seaward from her shipyard, gay with banners and with those extraordinary long streamers of which they were so fond. The great ship herself (the *Great Harry*, as she was called) was not a pre-eminent success, but the instinct which had led to her construction, the King's profound appreciation of the significance of sea-power, was one of the beginnings of future England.

Even when at anchor in these waters, their panoramic interest is never foregone. Traffic is constant. The echo of a steamer's fog-horn booms and reverberates, resonantly bass, through the darkness; and the strong pulse of her engines and propeller is heard, above the wash of the water and the distant rattle of derricks, and noises of the populated night. The great shape slides by, lighted everywhere; then another and another cargo-steamer throbs past, chary of cabin lights; with side-lights and steaming-light brilliant, but hardly another glimmer visible. Dark-sailed barges

steal by, and obscure as they pass some of the myriad pin-pricks of light and their twisted thread-like glitterings in the water. The yacht rocks and rolls again and again to the wash of the ships.

At anchor off Gravesend, and loitering on deck in the clouded lamp-lit night, one's thoughts can be led into many channels. No little Essex mud-creek, this, with a homely atmosphere, and restricted—if ancient—history; all the complicated modern machinery of world-commerce is here, oppressively huge, and the shadows hover of inexhaustible history. The old fleets have set sail and faded out of the picture, and are only ghosts and memories at Gravesend now. Ghostly and memoried and visionary also are the sails and shipping of a thousand years, whether the single square sails of earliest days, or the long sweeping oars of galley and galleass, whether the banner-like emblazoned sails and gilded tops of mediæval ships, or the creamy canvas, unsullied by modern smoke, of the stately Blackwallers. The scope is too wide, the memories too crowded. The humming past, in all its pictured activities, is bewildering in its fullness. One can only turn in, with a mighty yawn, and go to sleep upon it.

In dreams there may return the sound of the boatswain's piping upon some tall ship with her piled-up canvas aloft, and her great painted figure-head and carved pillars and handrails and gilded poop-lanthorns visible in the twilight as she slides by; it is all a dream, and sleep will not be disturbed by the clanking and the snorting of the

modern night outside. Sound sleep is proof against the measured rolling of the cabin from the wash of ordinary traffic; but if the dreamer is quite pitched out of his bunk and the yacht is rolling so deeply that she seems almost minded to roll over, and every noise and clatter of everything clatterable on board is released to run into riot of disturbance, then by these tokens he can recognize the Hull Fish-carrier. In a cloud of black smoke she has gone racing London-ward with thoughts of nothing but her market, and her wash is a thing to remember. He can put his blankets to rights and return to the region of dreams. The first grey streaks of dawn have not yet broken over the Thames.

VII

THE SWIN

"AY, it's snug enough there. Y'lay snug enough in Low Rope."

This might be the phonetic equivalent of what the bargemaster said, and his opinion is obviously shared by his kind, for one generally sees a little bevy of sprit-sail barges brought up at night on the west side of the Lower Hope when the wind is westerly. The steamer traffic cuts straight across between the West Blyth and Ovens Buoys, and—if one's vessel is out of the traffic and under a weather-shore for the dark night-watches—what more indeed is left for the heart to desire?

It is a good anchorage, and a pleasant one. Gravesend, too busy perhaps to be quite congenial, is escaped; it is just round the corner. At Gravesend and above it the air inclines to be smoky and the banks for the most part are unenticing. But here the air is clear, the westward bank close at hand is green and rural, and the prospect of Kentish Hills to southward lends a certain dignity to the landscape.

The tide would not serve until twelve noon, and I was well content to sit and look about me for awhile in the sunlit morning, while the yacht lay anchored

among the barges in the Lower Hope. Steamer traffic was without pause, and there was much to interest.

Tramps, hoppers and liners, smacks, tugs, and sailing barges, all were pursuing their lawful occasions, and the yellow-funnelled London excursion steamers, crowded with holiday-makers, throbbed past us, churning the water into long alleys of foam behind their old-fashioned paddle-wheels as they bustled down-river, bound for Southend, Margate and Ramsgate.

" That Belle steamer was a mine-sweeper in the War, and jolly useful they found the old excursion

paddle-wheelers." The speaker had only just emerged from his bunk, and came crouching out of the cabin. His hand, in act of pointing out the yellow-funnelled packet, was hastily recalled to steady him against the sudden roll from the wash of a steamer. He indicated the steamer by nodding his chin at it instead, while he held on.

"Nine miles from anywhere, no hurry," he quoted inappositely, as he returned below and pulled down a book from the book-shelf.

"Glass still falling?" I called down.

"I wish you'd keep the boat still if you want me to look at things for you," he grumbled languidly, as the wash of a passing steamer set everything clattering and creaking for about the fiftieth or hundredth time this morning. We rolled deeply to the swell.

Yes, the glass was falling; but, as it had been reasonably high before and the fall was not severe, we were making no complaint. The wind had backed in the night from the north-west to the south-west, and the indications favoured its remaining in that quarter—and blowing, perhaps. It was a fair wind for us, bound, as we were, down the Swin.

The blue sky was being clouded over, and we were missing the best of the day. The jib was set, and she was off. The anchored barges dropped astern, and before her mainsail had been fairly set and the halliards coiled down, she was slipping rapidly down the fairway.

The topsail jammed as it was hoisted, and I made my passage past the Mucking, past the wharves

and chimneys of Thames Haven, up the mast, coaxing out the obstruction. We were bound seaward down the crowded waterway in company with a regular fleet of sailing craft, and from my elevated perch I could see them stringing out astern, or scudding along in front with broken white water following. Barges and stumpies were brailed already; there was more body in the wind. Slightly over-canvased as we were, we came up with them rapidly one after another and dropped them astern.

The day had now been despoiled of all its sparkle and glitter; the sky was clouded and the broken water was green and grey as we left the Chapman Lighthouse astern, and, passing Leigh, Westcliff and Southend Pier, were again headed for the open sea. A few old liners and one full-rigged ship were anchored off Southend Pier. Huge and inert, they were soon astern, lessening grey masses, as we swung seaward.

It was time to furl the topsail, and—after its brief airing—the sail was furled and stowed. This wind was rising.

A tug came furrowing through the fretful water, throwing off a thick white breaking wave from each side of her bows, and belching black smoke astern. She held course to cross our bows, and gave one or two impatient snorts now and again, not distinguishable as signals, and rather resembling the hooting of a motor-horn. I held on. As she approached, holding way as if she would run us down, she suddenly changed her mind; I could see the spokes of the wheel being whirled round

and she altered course by thirty degrees, avoiding us. Whether or not the man's mother knew that he was out, I have not to this moment the slightest idea.

The Board of Trade has expounded the position with perfect lucidity by declaring that "when a steam-vessel and a sailing-vessel are proceeding in such directions as to involve risk of collision, the steam-vessel shall keep out of the way of the sailing-vessel." Sailing-men know that this in practice only operates—from the yachtsman's point of view—"as between equals," so to speak. The yachtsman so shapes his course as not to dispute passage with a liner; he keeps out of the way. He is also alive to the fact that, where the deep channels are narrow, even small steamers cannot always avoid him, be they never so willing. They would risk grounding. He adjusts his course accordingly. But on free and open water, a tug (not in execution of any special manœuvre) which shapes course so as to cross right ahead of a sailing-vessel, practically over her bows, in contravention of yet another regulation—such a tug ought to be sent home and locked up.

Ordinarily to a yacht navigated with elementary consideration, these little *contretemps* are rare in the extreme. A recent writer mentions that (in contrast with bygone quietude) "the eternal stream of steam liners, tramps and every kind of mechanically propelled craft have taken away the peace and pleasure of sailing on the lower reaches of the Thames." But not all of us find our pleasure

spoiled. As a general rule it is easy to avoid all controversy with the steamships; the difficulties of coping with the sailing-craft where waters are congested are really greater; but the excellent fellows are most sympathetic. If they, having the right of way, see that a yacht cannot avoid them without gybing, they will often shorten their own board and go about in order to keep clear. Once, after staying, I found that I must stay again almost at once to avoid a barge, and did so. We passed quite close. "I'd have gone about for you," the grey-bearded fellow at the wheel shouted almost reproachfully. "You needn't have let her come, not for me you needn't."

Far from disliking the eternal stream of steam liners and tramps, one finds pleasure in watching the everlasting pageant of them. Lighted and mysterious at night and various and full of interest and problems by day, they never come amiss. Here, as we passed the Mid-Shoebury Buoy and shaped course towards the Mouse Light Vessel, we were watching a Nelson Liner and a big blue-funnelled steamer which we were unable to identify. The liveliness of the yacht was already making it difficult to keep the glasses steady; she was lifting and rolling as she shouldered her way through the foam-broken grey water.

Course was laid for the Mouse instead of skirting up past the Blacktail Spit, so that, on gybing, the wind would be brought more definitely from one quarter of the yacht on to the other. We thus sailed across the measured mile a trifle obliquely;

the twin beacons stood up over the water on the port hand, and the stop-watch was started.

"Seven and a half knots," was the verdict. It was good speed for a boat of our size. The two pairs of beacons were not, of course, erected for the diversion of little vagrants like ourselves; the measured distance, with extreme depths of 36–48 feet, "is for ascertaining the speed of His Majesty's steam vessels." And the Maplin Sands behind them are the Artillery Range. "Vessels are forbidden, except for stress of weather, to anchor or ground on any part of the Maplin Sands northeastward of Shoebury, under penalty of a fine."

"That there ole skeer-crow, dunno wat to call 'im; feel fair ashamed to look at 'im, same's that." These words of an old bargemaster sprang to my mind as I watched a barge over our weather bow. "Fair ashamed of him," the old bargemaster had said apologetically, years ago, when an ancient barge, ragged-sailed and unkempt, wormed its way up the Thames one evening. We stood and watched. It was ragged beyond all reason, and—creeping like an evil witch through the twilight—looked like a haunted ship.

Similarly to-day as we steered down the Swin in this scramble of grey sea, a barge which crossed us, close-hauled, was out-at-elbows. With a large rent in her mainsail and another in her topsail she was small credit to her class; and her paintwork and the attire of skipper and man did little to atone. Yet she came steadily on, purposeful as any better boat; the waves, hitting her bows, slopped on

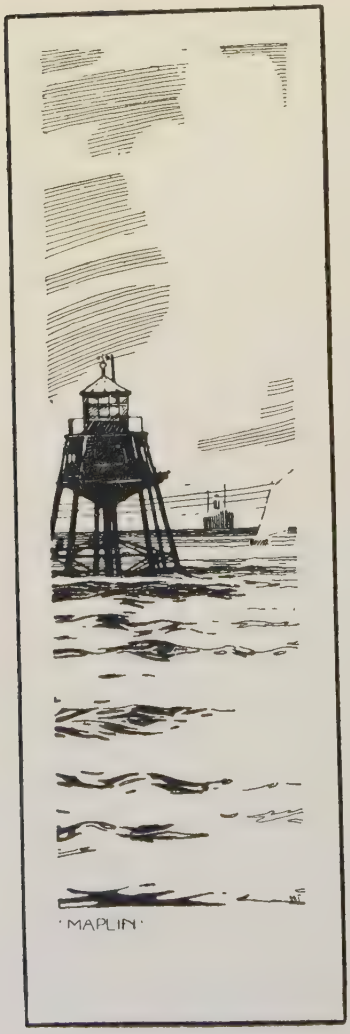
board, and the spray was scattering all about her. She crossed our track and went by.

"Seeing that the time is now half-past three," I remarked, "this lunch is the least trifle belated." We took it in turns, as the yacht lifted and dipped, running free towards the Maplin.

The wind was vigorous enough to give us a strong course through the water, and any cross-set of the tide was of less account to-day than in quieter weather. The out-set from the Thames and (later on) from the Crouch both have to be reckoned with. The old-time worthy summed it up accurately when, it 1660, he "surveyed ye sands from ye Hope to ye Orfordness and from thence to ye South Foreland, as exactly as things of this nature could be done on ye Sea." "Ye accompt of ye Sands," he said, "should enable piloting with safety, taking great care of ye tyds, which is a great peece of an able Pilot."

It was sometimes perhaps the scour of "ye tyds" that carried vessels off their course and put them on the sands. Technically, if a man or even a dog or cat escaped alive, the ship was held to be no wreck. But technicalities were of little avail. Once the longshoremen had put themselves aboard, and had ransacked the holds and stripped the ship of all removable gear, a legal definition would not help her. There she lay, holed and water-logged, gutted and cleaned out. She was left to the seas.

As lately as 1861 a ship ashore in the Middle Swin was plundered by men from the Essex Shore, who had forcibly taken the crew off her. The



marauders were finally driven off by a party of Marines.

Matters are very differently managed now, for the life-boat is as faithful in safeguarding property as she is zealous in saving life.

"Ercourse they din't know, not when they put off to her, they din't know but what there wasn't some chaps there aboard of her. They see a vessel ashore up top the Gunfleet yonder. That blowed suthen rough, jes' a hard strong breeze. 'Tweren't not a soul there. On'y a lighter, parted her towage, an' stranded. All alone, like."

The life-boat men, as I gathered, managed to pull the lighter off the sands and take her to a safe anchorage.

They had a stiffer problem one night in December when they

were called to a steamer stranded on the Little Sunk Sands in a rough sea, and they handled it with equal success. She was signalling for help, and two lifeboats reached her at 3 a.m. The two crews thought they could float her. Cargo to the extent of 300 tons was jettisoned; and the vessel, floated on the flood tide, was able to proceed on her voyage to London.

Down the South-West Reach the yacht was now heaving rapidly forward with the long swelling movement of the following sea. The Maplin Pile Lighthouse was soon abeam. Although the Old Shoe Beacon, which stood near this spot, was probably the oldest beacon of these waters, the Whitaker Beacon (further north at end of the Foulness Sands) was ancient also. It is known to have been established since 1588, and was probably in existence for years before that. There was also an old light at Foulness, established in 1719.

The Swin, or King's Channel, had more than local importance in the old days. Many of the channels had been less fully surveyed, and Grenville Collins in 1688 speaks of it as a main fairway for the Downs and the Straits of Dover. The only alternative course for the Downs mentioned by him is "over the Flats" (viz., the Overland Passage). The buoys for that Passage are shown upon contemporary Trinity House charts—"ye buoys of ye Narrowes."

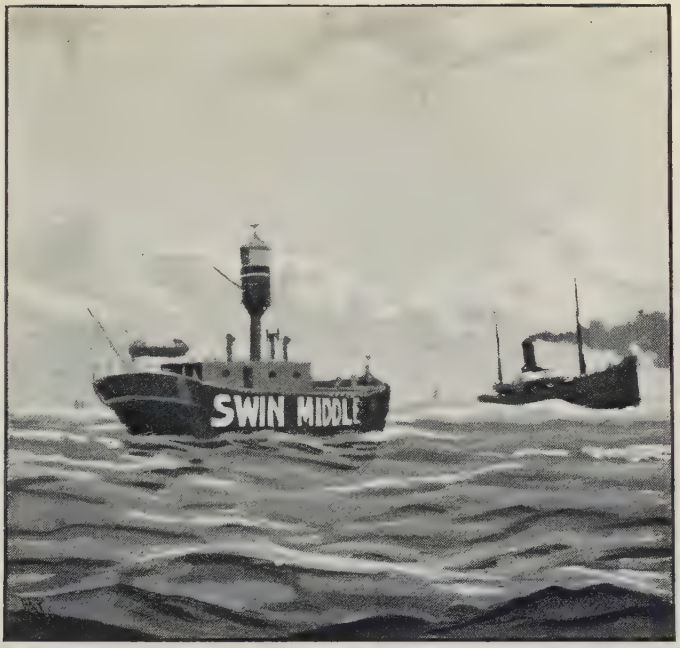
Ships passed us, both in the Swin and, further off, in the Barrow Deep. Unconcerned by the short seas that were lifting and tossing us from behind,

they flung those waves back from their bows in broken spindrift. They drove right through. And their dark smoke blew away from them, northward.

It was a real downright grey day, with sullen sky and sea to match. The whole seascape looked surly and forbidding; there was no majesty of storm, but a fretfulness, a sense of ill-temper. The green wave topped and curled, and left a scatter of impotent and useless foam. The wind creased and furrowed the steep slope of the waves. A wave hollowed and broke, then regathered and swelled forward to try again. The lather of foam dwindled, and was swept under by another wave.

The Essex Shore abeam of us was the flat land of Foulness with the system of creeks and islands to southward of it. In the old days it was all marshes and oozy creeks, full of ague. There are beaten tracks over the Maplin Sands parallel with the shore, tracks of great antiquity. People found it both easier and safer to walk below high-water mark than to attempt to cross the tidal creeks, and generations of Essex folk have fared that way when the tides have been low, in just the same way as they still walk and drive across the hard causeways to Essex islands which, at high tide, have a couple of fathoms of salt water all about them.

The skies were stubbornly grey and the wind grew chillier. Minor tribulations beset this passage. When we gybed, near the Mouse, the parrel line broke, and dropped the wooden beads with a rattle on deck. The mainsail had to be lowered; and, while the yacht bucked and wallowed in the



IN THE SWIN

dirty grey waves, the little damage was repaired and the sail reset.

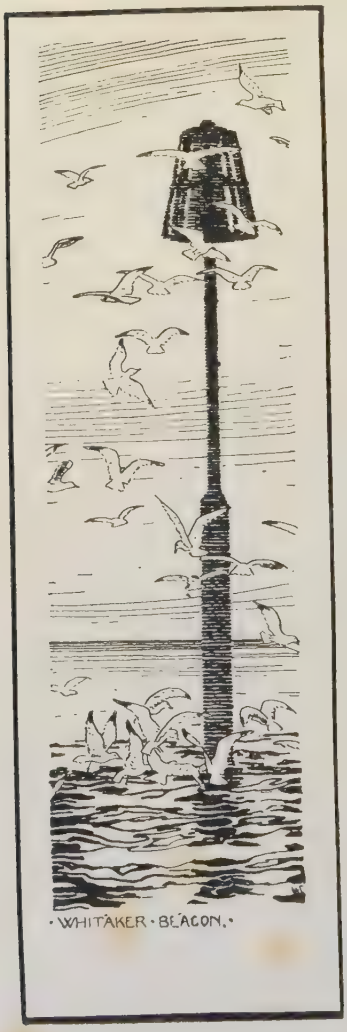
We were just past the Swin Middle Light Vessel when the next minor iniquity declared itself.

"*Thut.*"

That, so far as I can reduce it to writing, was the sound. Something white flapped for a moment up forrard, and then the jib was seen trailing from the bowsprit, helplessly in the water. Here was another opportunity for relieving the monotony with a little work. The halliard had snapped, and I was soon feeling the lift and roll of the vessel from the crosstrees on the mast instead of the deck, while I busied myself getting a new halliard rove through the blocks. Again I had the wider view. The yellow-funnelled Belle steamer passed us, bound for London. Her few passengers who were braving it on deck, dark-coated and buttoned up to the ears, looked forlorn and miserable as they stamped their feet with the cold. They crowded to the side to watch, and in a moment she had gone by. The view was again unbroken—only the wide green water streaked with white.

The sail was soon reset. No pause had been necessary, and we were headed for the Whitaker Buoy. We lifted with a slow heave as each wave swelled up astern, and we settled down with a long soft *whoo-oosh* into the trough as it passed, with the soap-suds whitening all the water about us.

These broken waters, the dull seascape grey and lonely about us now, were the rendezvous of the ships awaiting the combination of tidal and



climatic conditions needed for the night attack on Zeebrugge. The ships waited in patience and sailed in hope, only to return disappointed through a shift of wind, which would have sent the smoke-screens the wrong way. But at last they sailed, and did not return to the Swin; when the smoke had blown away and daylight had come, the block-ships were wedged immovably in Zeebrugge; and *Vindictive* and her consorts were berthed, battered and victorious—in Dover.

The seas around the yacht were getting steeper, and were more and more inclined to top. We had passed the Whitaker and were approaching the Swin Spitway Bell-buoy. It seemed just as if the waves were feeling the edge of the shoal and were beginning for that

reason to break—as if, after running freely down the Swin, they were being checked below.

The same conditions obtained as we were hustled through the Spitway. The tide was dead low and the drop in the trough of the wave was quite deep. It was very unlikely that we should touch, but the thing was remotely possible. On that account it was just a faint relief to be through.

At the Wallet Spitway Buoy we should have to haul our wind; we hove her to and pulled down a couple of reefs in the mainsail. The jib had already been changed.

The Admiralty Sailing Directions decide that the Spitway itself is little more than a shoal; and that obviously is the fact from the point of view of the deep-draught vessel. But this ancient fairway was not always so summarily dismissed. In some of the earliest Sailing Directions extant, nearly 500 years old, the Spitway was indicated as the main passage for coastwise navigation. "Bring your marks together that the parish steeple be out by east of the Abbey of St. Osyth, then go your course on the Spits south"; so, in those days, they steered by the leading marks on shore. Later on, and long before there was any profusion of buoys in Thames shoalwaters, the Gunfleet Sand was buoyed. "Ye buoy of ye Gunfleete" (at N.E. end of the shoal) was the first buoy off the Essex Coast. It dates from 1628, and the Swin Spitway Buoy was established not many years after.

Although the Spitway "cannot be considered anything but a shoal" for larger vessels, the

Admiralty concedes that "it forms a convenient transit for small craft between East Swin and Wallet Channels." It is much used by coastwise barges. After a long spell of north wind, when the breeze had veered southerly, I happened one day to be beating southward from Harwich through the Wallet. Strung out in single file over miles and miles of sea, the barges were northward-bound, running free. The yacht was passing them the whole time. As far as eye could see, they were streaming northward from the Swin through the Spitway. The long lines of lessening brown sails seemed endless.

We were still hard at work reefing, when a Brightlingsea smack, two reefs down, sailed past us. Heeling from the wind and throwing the salt spray about her, she looked a picture of efficiency. It would be a beat now for both of us, with long leg and short. She was by us before we had our reefs tied, and showed us a clean pair of heels. She went right ahead.

The water was smoother in lee of the shoals, but—close-hauled now—we flung it resolutely about in a little smother. Evening was drawing in, cheerlessly grey; decks and oilskins shone with the wet, and the green seas broke right aboard.

"Lee-ho. Let her come."

The helm went down and she curved into the wind.

"That's the sail gone, not the sheet; I know that sound."

It was the foresail. It had slit across. Was ever such a day for minor casualties?

"Bear away again, just while I stow it. There's

plenty of room," I called as I bundled up the torn canvas and lashed it down.

It left us somewhat out of trim, but the yacht seemed untroubled. The mainsail was sheeted in as the helm went down and she never hesitated in stays. And so she beat on in the gradual nightfall.

The grey shore stretched away to northward of us—the long flat coast-line. This coast has been regarded in history as one that offers opportunities to invaders, and the distant martello towers—almost lost in the greyness this evening, two or three miles to northward of us—were its defenders of a century ago. They were successors to other coastal defences. In 1529, for instance, Commissioners were appointed to "search and defend" Essex, and "sad and expert" men were sent to survey places for fortification. As a result of their sadness and experience, block-houses were built at St. Osyth and Mersea.

The tide was with us, and we could soon hold a direct course, close-hauled, for Mersea Quarters. The yacht threw the spindrift about her as she shouldered forward through the grey seas, doggedly resolute.

"Between lights, happen that ain't so easy-like. Easier if ther weren't no light at all. Chance times it's all that clear same's wot you couldn't mistake nothin', but come a mizzle or all a-hazin' in—Yes, yes, I allow it is—wonnerful funny then. Shapes wot ain't there, all a-shiftin' an' misty-like. *I* know wot you mean. Same's us, 'course we know like as you might say with yer eyes shut, but strangers an' that, very deceivin' that is, between lights."

I had advanced the theory one day that sometimes the twilight is more deceitful than the night, and the smacksman had agreed. To-night would be a case in point, the light was fading, the tide was just over the flats, and we had to enter Mersea Quarters. Fortunately we had reached the Nass before a perfect torrent of rain rushed down upon us, and expunged everything with a single touch of obliteration. The world had vanished. It was all thrashing rain and broken water and unhappy wind, moaning.

This was blindfold work for the time being, and not easy, as flats just awash were close on both sides. Whether by skill or good fortune it does not matter; we avoided the annoyance and delay of a temporary mud berth. A grey mast and hull glimmered through the rain, then another; we were among the yachts anchored in the Quarters, and our own anchor was let go.

Sitting in the lamp-light and warmth of the cabin, we listened to the noises of the night. With a sense allied to satisfaction we heard the vicious patter of rain on the deck above us, and the whistle and cry of that wind which swept over. Gusts would hit us with a regular thud and a buffet, and then roar off seaward into the night. One could fancy the Swin to-night, the desolation of it, with its confused dark water, all in the smother of blackness and rain, and with its few points of remote light, espied accidentally here and there in the turmoil. This snug cabin and Mersea Quarters were frankly better.

VIII

CROUCH RIVER FOR REFUGE

"I DON'T like the look of this weather," I grumbled.

"And yet the glass is rock-steady," he said, as he emerged from the cabin, having tapped the aneroid, a thing which the meteorologists say that he ought not to do. One meteorologist actually put his own barometer into a glass case—for no other reason than to keep his own rebellious knuckles out of mischief. Having made that concession to human weakness, the man of science sat down and wrote to the newspapers about it.

Rain and hail were rebounding off our oilskins and sou'-westers with a vigour so outrageous that it could not long be maintained. This was a bitter squall from the north. With two reefs down, the yacht was roaring through it. Though day was not yet over, her course down the Blackwater was a compass course, for nothing in heaven above or earth beneath was visible, except one indifferent turbid greyness of sea and cloud, and a narrow circle of ugly little waves, positively whitened by lash of this rebounding hail.

It was sunset-time, though with no vestige of

visible sunset, when she had passed the Nass Beacon, and it was dull absolute night as she skirted the Mersea Flats, and then, after slipping through into the Colne between the Coccum and the Bench Head Shoals, let go. At the very edge of the Mersea Flats she gained some shelter, for the wind was a trifle west of due north. But it was an uneasy berth, and she rocked and rolled all night.

The moon was shining at four in the morning, but the wind had such body that the two reefs in the mainsail, inherited from last night, were opportune and welcome. Bitterly cold it was, as well as windy, when we turned out in the grey light. Harwich and the Orwell were the objective, and as a cold busy passage was to be expected, especially when, after the Naze, the wind would be dead ahead—we were not minded to start without a thorough-going four-square breakfast. No *petit déjeuner* for us to-day, but honest bacon and eggs. The Duke of Wellington's idea about soldiers fighting best on a full stomach is no doubt a good general rule. But on this occasion the omission of the rite might perhaps have profited us, and the page of history have been written differently if we had weighed anchor at once. The tide had been ebbing before three, and cookery and its sequel cost us a good hour of the ebb.

"Jib only?"

Yes, that little shred of a spitfire jib would be quite enough for a start; it could be reinforced with the foresail at once, but the main-boom should remain in the crutch until Colne Point. The wind would be practically dead aft until then.

TWO REEFS DOWN

The moonlight was less confident now, for there was a strong hint of dawn. It was a clear-cut, bitter-cold, crystal-hard world this morning; there was no mistake at all about the matter. The waves were crisply lined, and steely in colour, but were touched here and there with bluish-white foam. And the glints of moonlight flicked and snapped on the jumping water. Cloud was spreading darkly over the sky again, and had again overshadowed the one glimpse of chilly blue dawn.

The anchor was broken out and the jib set. The yacht turned on her heel in an instant, and then swung off; she speeded away for the Point almost as if she had been under full sail. The lighted buoy was still flashing in the dull grey light. There was no need to set the foresail; we should not want it when we began to reach—it would only press the bows down, and throw the spray about. That smallest jib drove us for the moment at all the speed that we needed.

"Listen, more wind." There was a sudden louder sound of sea.

"No, it's the tide rip on the Shoal."

So it was. The Bar Shoal was right beside us, and we intended cutting across it; there would be plenty of water as yet. Up went the reefed main, and the peak-halliard was sweated on till the sail looked comely, and the yacht was trampling right through this froth and bobbery of fretful shoalwater. Under lee of the land it was a harmless affair; some fuss there was and hubbub, but little else. The yacht was driving solidly through the water.

Full day was gradually declaring itself, but clouds had wholly eclipsed all promise of the sun. We were completely alone. The sea was empty of sails, and there was not even a trail of steamer smoke on the horizon, nor vestige nor token of life on the bare sandhills and shingle of the flat shore-line. There are times when even this little homely passage of sea can claim a certain stern aloneness and isolation. The weather-shore was keeping the sea quiet, the waves were only chattering at the yacht's forefoot as they broke away, but the wind was putting her through it with a solid drive that was splendid to feel. A few gulls were following close in our wake, and they seemed, if anything, to enhance the sense of isolation.

Clacton was passed, dead-asleep in the grey morning light. The deadness and desolation of a populous seaside resort under a cold grey dawn is even impressive. There is a curious vacancy. The sensation was really what Henley felt (here from the sea instead of from the street) when he said :

> " Never a blind looks conscious,
> The street is asleep in bed."

Not a soul could be seen on the pier or on the sand, not a straggler on the clean-swept promenades. Bandstand, shelter and garden, all were utterly forsaken. A few moored sailing-boats bobbed and dipped and tugged at their chains, but not another thing moved. So Clacton went by.

The one fair interval (of the early moonlight) was over, and the wind was steadily gaining force and

·BEFORE·DAWN·— MOONLIGHT.·

body. As Clacton Pier dropped astern, the weather-shore was ceasing to be our benefactor; the seas gathered more solidly and began to break. She was soon close-hauled to it, and the spray was chopping and flying; cold enough the spray was in that bleak wind as it dried on one's face until the next drench came over. The yacht could no longer sail coastwise; the wind was turning her off-shore. She was forced to beat. The green water, time and again, washed heavily over the deck. She staggered and thrashed through. But she was making good progress, for the board brought her past Frinton and level with Walton Pier. It was

past eight o'clock now. Over the cold grey sea the place looked empty and forlorn as Clacton.

It was not to be denied that the wind was gathering force, and the seas were stronger. The little yacht pushed her bows gamely into it, but the waves shook her as they broke on board, and killed her eager little thrust to windward. She was thrown about heavily. We discussed pulling down the last reef, but rightly decided that this would squander her only chance of thrusting effectively to weather. Already she had little enough driving power to pit against the waves, as they broke diagonally upon her; with less sail she would only sag away to lee. Spray poured down our oilies. The Naze Tower was now abeam, but the ebb was finished, and the wind was whooping straight down upon us from Landguard Point, full in our teeth.

This old Naze Tower, erected in 1720 by Trinity House, stood up on the landfall. When built, it took the place of some tall trees, shown in the old charts, which—kept in line with Walton Hall—led through Goldmer Gat, north of the Gunfleet. The Tower, which is also a mark for the Long Sand Head, is 81 feet high and the top is 138 feet above sea-level.

We pressed vigorously on, trying to make it a mark on our lee. But, underneath all the scramble of this soapy lather, all this trouble of waves, a smooth force unseen had set itself to compass our undoing. The tide had turned. Not wind only, but also tide, was holding us away from Harwich. The waves, breaking no longer against the strong

run of the tide, ought to have become more mannerly, but they had evidently no notion of it; if anything they were more hostile than before.

We lurched and floundered and staggered, board by board. The main was sheeted briskly in as the helm was put down, and she never missed stays. But the break of the waves was breaking the willing heart of her. She carried confidently against the wave, and the curling foam-cap reared spitefully and thudded on her bows, boiling and swirling on board. She was knocked dead-still. The great patterned lathers of white bubbles, creaming and bursting on both sides of her, were not left behind; she was absolutely stopped. Then she gathered way and renewed the effort.

"I fancy we're not going to bring it off this time; at all events not till the tide helps us."

She had struggled on nearly to the Stone Banks Buoy, but the tide was running full against her. We did not feel drawn to six hours more of this, especially as one place was as good as another, and Harwich, *qua* Harwich, had no particular virtue.

Possibly "straining a yacht and pushing her up against those there heavy seas" was a thing that "didn't do a yacht no good." The words were those of an old yacht skipper. Be that as it may. We took no account of it; we simply considered our own inclinations. We put the helm up and let her run.

More than one yacht of three times or four times our tonnage (as I heard later) had stayed in port and would not put to sea at all, as the wind was bordering

THE NAZE TOWER.

on a gale. And now, full before that wind, she careered merrily away, having exchanged in one instant the slow jerk and upward pitch, the turmoil and endless racket, for speed—and for the long lift and fall of the following sea. The Naze cliffs strung out in line and dropped away; the shed-like building at end of Walton Pier loomed up rapidly and sprang into size, flipped by, and fell astern. She had soon brought the wind over the land again, and had carried on, ramping full, past Clacton, laid over to an extent that her stiffness rarely concedes when off the wind. Mersea Quarters was to be the anchorage, and she shaped course for the Bar Buoy.

The Bar Buoy would be her furthest point down to leeward. With the mainsheet eased off,

she went solidly roaring down to it, and as she curved, gradually, gradually in through the blocks, the sheet was shortened to bring her on to the wind again.

Wh-whish ! Thurra, flap, thurra, thurra, thurra. . . .

Those were the sounds, and there was a great tongue of loose sail, slatting and cracking in the wind. The mainsail had split right across ; it was slit in two from leach to luff.

" Just when she *would* do it." I spat the words ungraciously as I hoisted myself out of the well, for the string of shoals was under the lee, barely half a mile distant, and the tide was down. " Keep her on the wind all you can," I added, but he was doing it already.

The wisest course would really have been to have run round the east end of the Knoll, and so for the Crouch at once. But we hoped to make Mersea yet.

The foresail was set. We carried no trysail, but the biggest jib was hauled from the locker and dumped on deck, and I attacked the job of bending it with vivid energy ; time was everything, and we were taking risk of shipwreck by remaining on the weather side of the shoals. If we touched we were likely to bump our iron ballast through our bottom and to break up.

" Coarse weather, same's that, you cop it proper. You doan want no shoals, not under your lee, not them times."

So one smacksman said with conviction, and grinned appreciatively, a day or two later ; and another, gliding by in a light breeze a few weeks

afterwards, had remembered it still, for he called across :

" Better weather same's this Wullet way, I allow you didn't have no call to git your mains'l blowed away."

The gaff had no downhaul, and come down it would *not*. The long spar with its great rag of torn sail thrashed and flogged about, *cracking* from this side to that side with the rolling of the ship. The sea made itself felt so much more, now that we were stopped; not only did it throw the yacht about, it jerked her time after time with so sudden a tilt that work was well-nigh impossible—it was the most that one could do to keep from being chucked overboard in some vicious lurch. If a halliard were let go for an instant it would stand streaming out from the mast like a long pennant, and could only be recaptured when a deep windward roll of the yacht brought it inboard for a moment. Water was sluicing over the deck all the time. But before we had drifted dangerously to lee of the N.W. Knoll Buoy (and be sure that critical eyes had been upon that same buoy all this time), the gaff had been brought down and lashed to the boom, the latter had been sheeted down and crutched amidships and the make-believe trysail had been set. It was woefully inadequate, but—to some extent—we were again under control.

To add to the festive character of the occasion, a black squall brought a smoking down-rush of rain. I had been wearing a long oilskin and knee-boots (not a good combination), and the water had got

into my boots by this time, so that I was slopping about deck with both boots full of water.

"Never mind, it may take the heart out of the wind, and then we can anchor, and get to work on the main." It was a fallacious hope.

The rain thinned, and then redoubled; it tailed off again, and again swept and smote the sea and stung a white lather all along its surface. The very fury of this rebounding rain flattened the waves while it lasted; then the squall passed, but the wind did not. Not a bit did it mitigate. It blew as hard and as cold as ever, and the sea had not forgotten an atom of its former vice.

With our new jury-rig, we found that we could reach accurately enough across the wind but we could not turn to weather. We held a staggering course over past the Bench Head slowly enough, with the water thumping now and again on the deck in solid green. We turned to and fro and tried hard, but Sales Point could not be weathered, and there was no hope of making the Blackwater.

Nothing remained but to run for the Crouch. The tide was rising, and we could slip through into the Rays'n (Raysand Channel). Then, when the entrance had been made and we were under the lee of Holliwell Point, we should anchor, get out the "palms," and address ourselves to that ungainly rent in the mainsail. "Cobble it up," we said; that was all that we could attempt—a merely temporary repair.

Cold and wet (and, incidentally, hungry) we were glad of a decision. It was now afternoon, and we

had been kept busy since five o'clock this morning. Again running free, we could see that we were shifting the shore-marks at a great pace; it seemed but a moment before the wind-pump on Holliwell Point was abeam, and we were passing the Shore Ends, entering the Crouch. With light hearts we let go the anchor; close up to the north bank of the Crouch we had a solid shore to weather and a soft mud shore away to lee. We furled the sails and went below; it was a welcome pause.

When pitting one's little thews and resources, be it even in a corner of seaway like that outside, against the sea which is primitive and unaltering, one is drawn palpably nearer to the primitive life and adventure of the long past. As then, the sea's blind fury of assault is countered by eye and hand; the wind, bellowing at large, is even humoured into service. Worsted or prevailing, our outlook and methods had been in small measure akin to those of old days.

Northmen, iron-thewed, were before us at these Shore Ends. Weather-beaten and sea-weary, they had made their haven. But their conquest was yet to make. Men of the Sagas, they smelt battle as they entered, with the swinging battle-axe and the reek of blood; for them it beckoned like a gilded dream, glowed like a tumult of colour and glory.

We, for our part, were more modest. We had rather not exchange javelins or arrows with shaggy people running about the banks. We had enough on our hands at present, with that sail still unmended. But a brief rest seemed to be indicated; the alarm

clock was therefore set to awaken us in an hour or so, and we both rolled ourselves up in blankets and were fast asleep as soon as we lay down.

I was awake before the alarm clock sounded. I stretched myself, as I lay, in utmost contentment, for there was a welcome gleam of sunlight aslant across the cabin. It proved to be quite an accidental outburst, and was whipped away and smothered in an instant; the storm was not over. Now that I began to notice things, we were pitching much more heavily than when I had turned in. "Slop, slop, *whish*," I could hear the spray rattle on deck, and I was nearly rolled off my bunk by the sudden snatch of movement. Lying there, I looked into the cockpit, and the high coaming framed a square of sky. At least, out in the open it is not usual to see anything but sky there while lying down. But suddenly into this square the dinghy heaved up, visible to the waterline, on a great green wave, and dropped again from sight. "*Conk*," I heard her hit the counter as she dropped, and felt the jar of it through the yacht's frame. The sea must be getting up in real earnest, I thought, and I had better get up too and see what it all meant.

Scrambling up on deck, I found that we were surrounded by big steep waves. As I squatted in the well to take stock of the situation the dinghy went soaring royally aloft on a swelling green wave, then dropped her stem down on the counter rail with a *clack*, and slid off stern first into the water again. My eyes were still a trifle sleepy, and I blinked, and rubbed them.

Then, looking round for the shore-marks, I understood. The yacht had dragged her anchor and gone lurching off—like a thing drunkenly ineffectual—into the very middle of the tide-way. Mercy it was that she had not gone further. The wind had shifted north-easterly and was storming full against the ebb. With the scour of the tide the waves hollowed and broke. Small wonder that the yacht weltered; this steep sea was no place for anchorage; we had lost our shelter again, and it was high time once more to seek sanctuary.

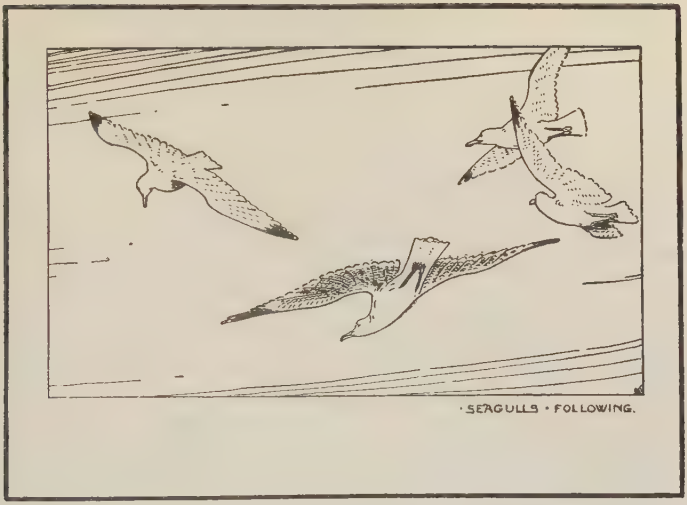
"Come on, roll out, young fellow, we've got to shift again."

Deaf at first, the sleeper returned the same reply, at second time of asking, as Voltaire gave to the literary hack. The hack had protested, "But, sir, I must live." Said Voltaire, "Sir, I do not see the necessity."

The sleeper rendered a negligent paraphrase of Voltaire, perioded by two yawns and the rubbing of an eye. Then he rolled back in his blankets, unconvinced.

"If you turn out on deck, you'll soon see 'why,'" I called after him, compactly, and went. Curiosity brought him out where zeal would have failed, and he made unfavourable remarks both about the anchor and about the wind, as he lurched with the tumble of the boat and surveyed the desolate scene. Clouds again had buried the sun, and the wind really bit.

The jib was run up, and I hauled away at the cable. The yacht reared and burrowed, so that



SEAGULLS · FOLLOWING.

foothold on the wet deck was no certain matter, but up came the anchor until its shackle clanked on the fairlead, and I hung over to bring it inboard. I gasped. To the best of my knowledge it had gone down a perfectly good anchor, but it came up flukeless. Both its flukes had been shorn clean away. It now hung dangling from the anchor-fairlead a miserable and useless cross, a stock and shank only, a shameless fraud.

"It never rains but it pours," I shouted; "we knew we had no mainsail and now we know we have no anchor. You go and look."

I took the helm, and he went forrard, incredulity in his eyes as he passed me. In the meantime the jib was not enough to carry us effectively over the

strong ebb, and foresail and trysail were set, so that we now began to creep up towards the mouth of the Roach. The spire of Foulness Church had been just opposite, and gradually it began to drop away astern. The fair wind now was a godsend.

Uselessly, we speculated as to how and when and why those flukes had shorn away, for the anchor had been in use for years, and had held the yacht under severer direct strains within my certain knowledge. And then we rendered thanks for that easterly shift of wind. Had it remained due northerly, wind would not have held us against the tide; the ebb would have swept us seaward, and the raging north wind would have piled us up on Foulness Sand, where we should most probably have left the ribs of the yacht and quite possibly our own ribs beside. As it was, wind and tide had counteracted one another and held the yacht poised between them and out of danger and mischief. It had been providential.

But what now? The kedge could not hold her, "not with this wind blowing and this tide." If we had a mainsail and no anchor, we could sail her where we would; if we had an anchor and no mainsail, we could anchor her and effect repairs. But with no mainsail and no anchor, we were laughably crippled. Evidently we had better sail for Burnham; if successful, we could pick up a spare mooring; failing that, we must put her on the mud somewhere well away from the sea.

This would now be a race with the daylight. It is no uncommon occurrence, after girding at the

wind in the forenoon for its violence, to grumble at it in the evening for dying away when wanted. So it was destined to prove to-day. After the wind, in pure spite, had made ribbons of a perfectly good mainsail, and had raged furiously at us in our rather embarrassed condition, it now threatened—when really wanted—to go away, leaving us anchorless at mercy of the tide. For the moment it was adequate; but, after we had been under way for an hour, slowly, slowly mastering that full run of tide, the skies cleared gradually, and sunset over the dark land was laid bare. With the clearing, the roughness of the wind abated. We were no longer running free, but were reaching; and we were severely handicapped by these poor little sails in making against the tide.

It did not really matter now; the kedge would hold at edge of the tide-way if the weather were quiet, but we coveted the security of a mooring for the sake of a care-free night. The wind was still hard and cold, but the thrust and bite had gone; it lacked the old body.

"There's only one fly in the ointment. This would be jolly if we only had an hour more daylight. It's going to be too dark to spy a mooring by the time that we reach Burnham."

The masts of Burnham, silhouetted darkly against the strong coppery afterglow in the west, were visible far ahead.

"If we can only get to Burnham, we shall be able to get the sail ashore to a sailmaker first thing in the morning, without having to get under

way again, and without having to 'cobble' at it ourselves."

But the going was dead slow, thwarted by the ebb. The water over the bows picked up the deep brown of the waning sunset, but the land was dark—with hard, dark, wind-scoured edges. We were still making way.

Outstretched on the port hand, sunset-wards, was the wide flat where Canute had his Danelagh camp; and the past inclines to be more familiar under gloom and persuasive mystery of sundown. Our school history lessons too often commenced at "William the First, ten sixty-six," and we are apt to forget the manly figures before the Conquest. Canute we mainly remember as giving stupid orders to the sea and then getting his feet wet. It was in that dark land under the sunset that Canute the Dane fought against Edmund Ironside the Saxon, nine centuries ago. The Danish Raven worsted the Saxon Dragon. But all is at one now between them, and only on the flat deserted landscape:

> "The wind that wanders, the weeds wind-shaken,
> These remain."

The night was creeping on all too fast, and we ourselves were creeping forward all too slowly. The reflected light in the water ahead was becoming less, and was less brown and more coldly blue. The sun had set nearly an hour and a half ago, and there would have been no chance at all of seeing a mooring-buoy if the water ahead had not been under the western sky.

"You take the tiller," I said. "I believe I can

see one; and I'll keep my eye hard on it all the time, and tell you which way. If I lose it for one instant, it's gone."

The quarter of an hour which followed seemed an eternity, and the object might not be a mooring-buoy after all. It was eagerly grabbed. The stout bass rope brought up a sturdy length of chain; there was not a doubt of the matter. The chain was fast on the bitts in a moment, and we were moored. As the time was now an hour and three-quarters after sunset, we were conspicuously lucky to have been able to see the buoy.

All about us were straight masts and silent hulls, dark on the dull blue of the water. Burnham was asleep. A few lights glittered along the water-front and one or two anchor-lights, conscientiously shown, shone between masts and rigging. Not a soul was stirring.

More characteristic, in sunshine after rain, is Burnham by day, when white sails are everywhere. Lying wind-rode, the tall yachts dry their canvas, and in and out skim the small white sails, now among them, and now stringing away seaward. The yacht-hands, polishing brasswork and overhauling gear, exchange cheery words; dinghies ply to and fro and a crowd of them is clustered about the steps. There is bunting above the club-houses; gay dresses are bright ashore, and there are white ducks ashore and afloat also, and bronzed faces of capital fellows. That is Burnham.

Next day I was chatting to a hard-bitten old boatman.

"That blowed full gale yesterday, 'bout midday," he said.

I should like to claim the full gale, but—strictly on my conscience—I cannot. It was a moderate gale only; though destructive beyond its station, it had not really graduated to the full standard of wickedness. A moderate gale—let it stand at that.

IX

NIGHT IN THE RAYS'N

AFTER one of her coarser spasms of ill-temper, Nature will wear a smile of most disarming innocence. If, for instance, she has chased some vessel ashore to destruction and has drowned the crew overnight, she will become benign at once; the ship's gutted hull, left in its cradle of rock, is soon overlapped by blue wavelets only, and the sunlight is mild upon it. Looking down from the windless cliff-top, one might marvel that the man had been fool enough to put her there.

So it was to-day. The storm of yesterday which had slashed our neat mainsail cross-wise, and made two separate untidy rags of it, was not one of Nature's finer exhibitions of malice, though spleenful enough while it lasted. Now, on the morning after, Nature had her very best air of disavowal, for the sky was cloudless and the sun rose through a thin veil of mist, spread ghost-like before dawn on the quiet waters of the Crouch. The north wind was still alive; it breathed faintly over the river-surface and rippled it. But this delicate touch had little that betrayed its mood of yesterday.

The ball of the sun had become visible; and

the wind—though still sending the mist in ghostly eddies over the ship—grew certainly less. There was hardly a ripple. Then the sun gradually dispersed the vapours, and gave us full-coloured day. Although we were out of commission, the propitiatory sunshine was welcome, and the sights and sounds of the waterside are always congenial.

First of all the mainsail must be unbent; we unlaced it from boom, gaff and rings, bundled it together, threw it in the dinghy and rowed it ashore. At top of a steep wooden ladder was a sail-loft, among ancient sheds. Better still, a sailmaker was discovered within, spectacled and alert, who would machine in fresh cloths and have the sail ready by this afternoon.

He had spread the sail out on the floor of his loft and had given his verdict.

"Blowed yesterday, that did," he added. "Nasty weather for you gemmen, same's that. Back after dinner-time to fetch it? Ready then, that will. Yes, yes."

It was a picturesque jumble of sheds; the place was quite approved, and the blue water as we returned to the waterside looked the bluer for the virtual certainty of our readiness for sea by this evening's tide.

Next an anchor. A stranger might expect to find anchors of all ordinary weights in dozens at a place like Burnham. But after exploring untold cellars and sheds worm-eaten and discoloured, after seeing several great mudhooks which suggested barges and several small ones which suggested

rowboats, I was still unsuited. Finally I was fain to accept an anchor heavier than I wanted, a clumsy rusted brute, but not so heavy as to be ludicrous. On asking the man the price, I was referred to the "boss," and the "boss," when interviewed, didn't suppose we should quarrel if he said a quid. He told off a man to carry the anchor to the dinghy.

High water was 4 p.m. The sail was ready before that time and was soon re-bent. We worked in the afternoon sunlight with eager hands; the time of our durance was nearly expended. The ships had swung, and the ebb, not yet pronounced, was moving quietly seawards. We finished our

task before five, slipped the mooring and set sail.

A Maldon barge was among the vessels anchored below us. Close-hauled to the wind, we slipped rapidly across her, down-helmed, and repassed her, now astern.

"Evenin'."

A rugged-faced fellow stood, with one hand on the shrouds, and watched us—a picturesque figure in the warm low sunshine. He recognized the yacht, and spoke of Maldon.

"Goin' ther now?" he queried.

"Yes."

"That'll be mos' dark, time you git outside." He took his pipe out of his mouth and sent a blue whiff of smoke after it. Then he paced slowly stern-ward, waved a genial hand and went below.

The breeze was brisk and steady from the east. Dead up-river, it made beating slow; and we took comfort from the thought of change of course outside. A long leg, almost a reach, would befriend us from the West Buxey Buoy, inside the Shoal. We should begin spilling the miles astern then, provided always that the wind had not dwindled dishonestly and fallen flat. And in the meantime we had tea as we worked our diagonal courses, eastward always, with the blue ebbing water, down towards Foulness and the sea.

The glass, which had risen again in the night, was tired of smoother prophecies and had begun a wavering descent. Mistrust of the falling barometer is a superstition; really this downward

movement put a premium upon southerly or westerly wind, and made that destructive north-easter less likely. On balance we were likely to be better served; but the mistrust is instinctive and survives.

The distances were remarkably clear. As we passed the Shore Ends (a local name among sailing men, unknown—I believe—to the map), Sheppey became visible to the south and Clacton to the north; the low sunlight was still golden upon the grassy sea-walls. Where the Foulness Sand was beginning to uncover, groups of sea-gulls stood at the edge of the shoal or circled in groups above it. Then the sunlight deadened and faded, and the sea gradually assumed that flat pallid tone, dead blue-grey, which comes with the twilight. We were at sea.

"See the West Buxey light?"

First sign of real night, the coastwise lights were becoming visible. The great beam of the Swin Middle soon swung round, like a searchlight, every fifteen seconds, but the Maplin—"obscured" from here—was not as yet in evidence.

"What about those long legs of ours?"

The inquiry had no reference to anatomy, but rather to hope deferred. The wind was dishonestly shifting ahead of us, and we were still compelled to turn dead to windward through the Rays'n (Raysand Channel). But we should not, at all events, be denied a night-breeze; the staunch little wind, frank and steady, was keeping us well under control. That long waste of grey-blue water seaward hid from sight the Buxey Shoal of hard, nasty, wicked sand which has pounded to pieces more

yachts than one, and the ebb was setting us towards it. Wind—though a foul wind it were—was welcome.

"Things would have been made so much simpler if we could have reached the Buxey Beacon before dark. We can't do it now. And it's no use trying to feel the way along the Buxey with the lead."

The edge of the Shoal is so steep that the lead gives no warning. Evening had gradually faded and night was upon us; it was quite dark, and a short passage of blindfold beating followed. Underwater on one side was the steep Buxey, and on the other was that big hump on the Ray Sand where the Fishery Beacon used to be. Both are unfriendly. We would grope on; we would find the Beacon if we could, and use it as a jumping-off place to cross over to the Dengie side, and then keep touch again, the edge of the shoals being less abrupt on that side.

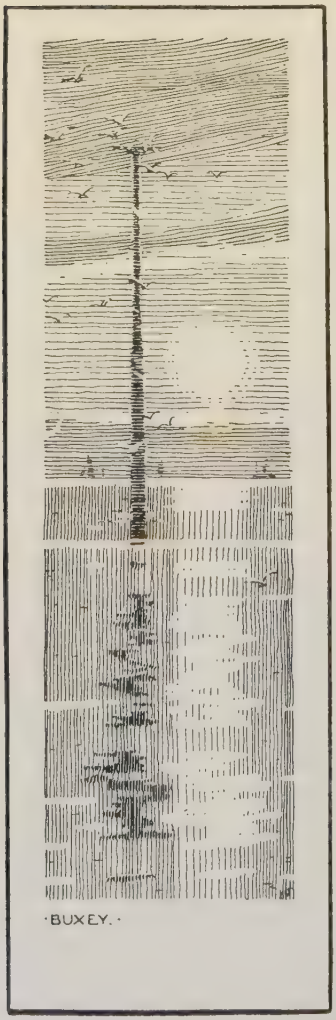
Barely a glimmer of the lost sunset-light remained, over the blur of land to westward. That land, if sought and discovered, would be solid county Essex, and not a detached fragment of island. One seldom realizes that Essex is conspicuous among the counties by reason of its insular profusion. No other county is so befringed with islands. The Thames gives one (Canvey), the Blackwater two (without counting Mersea) and Hamford Water has a minor archipelago; besides which the seaward land to south of the Crouch is bitten up into a little island system. They fit into one another like a jig-saw puzzle, and with every high tide the water comes sluicing and washing round between them—

high tides which are only held off the land by long miles of grass-grown sea-wall. The names of many of them are Danish, which indicates at least a thousand years of history.

A mere blur in the darkness, but a distinct upright, there it was—the Buxey Beacon. The helm went down; the definite location was satisfactory. Blindman's-buff among unlighted shoals at night has a charm quite indefinable, and a definite score in the game is occasion for a small smile of satisfaction.

But, mostly, there is a quiet solemnity here, into which one relapses in a moment. Words may ripple the silence, but the still surface recovers sway, unruffled and perfect. When faced by this reticence, this uncomprehended quality of night, the little lamp-lit cabin is sometimes almost a relief. The night is so absolutely negative. Its inscrutable darkness has expunged everything; it brings emptiness and silence where the life and business of countless shore-side sea-going generations have prospered. That bright little cushioned home of ours below can become almost a recall from the shadows.

Knowledge that hidden shoals are lurking under the night lends, moreover, a certain sinister aspect, a certain weirdness, to the seascape. The shoal-waters have character and even witchcraft. There is a strangeness about them and a grim sense of reserve. Perhaps the Buxey, as its name implies, was once an island with green woods and grassy levels; it is shorn smooth enough now. Barren



under scend of the salt sea-tides and scud of the foam, it has become nothing but a grave and a memory. Its higher levels would at this state of ebb be uncovered; but all was unseen, being at one with the long blur of indistinct dark grey colour that stretched to undefined horizons. Above was the starlit sky.

There—on the dark Essex shore, could we but see it—is the little Saxon church of St. Peter's - on - the - Wall. Probably the oldest church in Essex, there it has stood for thirteen centuries, since St. Chad built it and the Venerable Bede put its name on record. But St. Chad had built, even then, on a site of ruins overthrown, for the Roman station of Othona was here before him, and the "Count of the Saxon

Shore" with his entrenched Castrum had tried to keep the Saxons out. Their handiwork has finally survived his own. Then the Danes invaded the Saxons. And the Normans overwhelmed both. Generation after generation has rolled across it, like wave after wave on the beach, with triumph and slaughter and love and hatred and death besetting every individual human creature of them all in the whole fierce fantastic age-long pageant. And when one seriously ponders those two lines of the poet:

> "Momentous to himself as I to me
> Hath each man been that ever woman bore";

then one really begins to get a faint glimmering of the scale of the picture.

It is partly the distances and the mystery, even by daylight, of those long green Essex levels, probed and explored as they are by blue arms of the sea, that give them their air of dignified aloofness. Here also, where the sea-tides are never still, the tide of time seems itself almost to have paused. The place must stand recognizably as it was. "The same wind sang and the same waves whitened" when Roman or Viking was here, and the same shoals divided and channelled the blue salt water, and the same border of shingle and scattered seaweed surrounded the flat green shores.

It is an age-old superstition that spirits of the dead are blown seaward "on nocturnal blast," and Swinburne, further northward along this same coast, found in it the real

> "Hades, manifest, beholden.
> Surely, surely here, if aught be sure!"

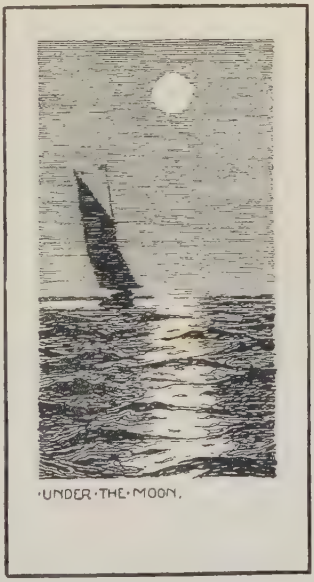
Even in broadest daylight there is a sadness, when skies are grey over the lonely land and the grey shoalwater; and—by night—there can be an oppressiveness of austere mystery, as already suggested, fit to send one into the lighted cabin for shelter.

The blur of light to northward, down on the horizon, would be the lights of Clacton; later, the lights themselves were manifest. The hour was inclining towards midnight now, and the promenades would no longer be a-glitter with life. But earlier in this same evening, which had been very darkness itself out here, that murmur of modern seaside life with its lamps and bandstands and gaily-lighted hotels was in full tide and traffic; the place was not ten miles separated from us in mere linear distance. But here, in the dark space and reality of night, the lonely Roman centurion in the darkness of ancient Othona seemed nearer and more real than all the glitter of modern Clacton.

Modern Clacton might even have heard me speaking, for all the lights suddenly went out with a " flick " in a single instant. It was just midnight (Bull's Noon in Essex phrase); someone no doubt had turned off an electric switch somewhere, and then probably ambled off down some mean modern street, infinitely remote from here, and gone home to bed.

But the distant line of pin-prick lights was succeeded by a rival more worthy. A silvery ghost of a glimmer—as of dawn—had been tinging the low sky along the sea to eastwards, and the waning moon was now red in the low mist, rising.

It is a strange fact that the moon—pleasant and companionable creature though she be—seldom makes night-sailing appreciably simpler, here among the shoals. If one desires to locate an unlighted buoy, for instance, it is practically as hopeless a task to find it by moonlight as in night unmitigated. No buoy was at this moment wanted, but the shape and position of the land, if declared, would have helped. Clear though the moonlight became, the land remained invisible; it was lost in the long grey blur, indifferently the same along every horizon, save the one silvered slip of sea-line eastwards, directly under the moon.



·UNDER·THE·MOON.

"It's a nice little breeze," I meditated appreciatively, as the living little flaw reached out from the greyness and fanned one's cheek, "but its direction isn't kind. It simply is not. For a well-behaved little draught like this, it is just about as 'contrairy' as a wind can be."

Gentle though it was, the wind had been quite capable—so long as the tide had favoured and had given us gradual progress, by the beam. But the

flood-tide was now running up between the shoals out of the dark sea into the Crouch, flooding through, lapping round the grey islanded shoals still uncovered, and streaming into the channels. The whole grey face of the water was moving against us. The same process would have been a perfectly attractive happening, could we have but weathered the long line of the Knoll Sand before the tide had turned southward again, for in that event it would have taken us with it up the Blackwater. As it was, the tide was busily trying to slide us back, with its insidious smooth current, back to Burnham and the Crouch.

" This ain't no good," I added colloquially, but with settled conviction ; " we'll cut the tail of the Knoll and take the risk. The water's smooth and the tide rising. Those boards out towards the Swire Hole carry us into the full run of the tide. If the tide once really got us and took command, we shouldn't escape at all till the next ebb. We'd have to anchor."

" I wish the North-West Knoll were still lighted," he rejoined.

It would have been a minor blessing to-night, if need for economy had not recently occasioned its untimely dowsing. Instead of a flashing beacon of light, it was now a painted tub only, that rocked invisibly somewhere away in the darkness. Close-hauled, the yacht approached the hidden shoal-line through the grey moonlit sea. The lead had been splashing into the water, but was now hastily discarded in favour of the more primitive " boat-

MOONLIGHT ON THE SAILS

hook" method, and the long boat-hook was "jabbed" downward at rapid intervals to test the depth.

"Less than a fathom, shoaling, shoaling, shoaling—no good—lee ho!"

She swung into the wind, catching the moonlight brightly on the other side of her white sails aloft as they shivered doubtfully a moment, and then filled confidently to their smooth rounded contour as she bore away on the new tack.

"A near one that," one of us laughed. "I felt the keel touch as she came about—not that it matters. One board further down and we'll sneak across, if the tide hasn't stopped us too much."

The moonlight flickered, living silver, on the water; the breeze hummed for the moment alertly. It was a perfect night. About once more, the yacht was again putting the matter to the touch.

"Shoaling still, shoaling—but carry on, shoaling a little, yes, yes, all right, the same, the same, barely enough, the same, deeper, deeper, more than a fathom now." She was over.

"Oh, the little more and how much it is," sings the poet, and we echoed his wise word to-night, for we were now in the Blackwater tide. Sorrowfully, however, we realized that the tide had no great margin of life for our help; it had played the hindering game all too effectively. The hour was approaching two o'clock, and we decided to anchor off East Mersea and sleep while the ebb tide was running down.

"The glass is still falling. The wind backed

ANCHORAGE.

to get into the north, and this dropping glass means it's backing further. West wind to-morrow."

"Just so as to head us up the Blackwater," he laughed. The sequel upheld him.

In the meantime we were beating towards the mouth of the Colne, there to give our rusty new second-hand anchor its first opportunity of service. The Knoll gas buoy bore east-south-east, and it seemed to hang interminably there, just to the north of the glittering track of the moonlight on the sea. But we were creeping on. The flashes of the Colne Point Buoy were becoming crisper and brighter, and those of the Knoll were deader; it was getting remote. The yacht was slipping rapidly through the water, she was nearer and nearer; a shimmering white object sprang out

of the moonlit haze on the port hand and streamed away smoothly astern—the white Fishery Buoy. Then a dark channel-buoy, unseen ahead, leapt into sudden shape right beside us and slipped, chattering to the tide, astern. We had soon reached the position where we proposed to lie, and it was just three o'clock in the morning when the anchor was let go.

"The glass is tumbling fast; we shan't lie as snug as this when we wake up in the morning." He scrambled back on deck, after having put the kettle on below, and helped me to finish furling the wet sails. We lay anchored in the wide openness of the moonlit night. I might have told him that it was morning already, but I only yawned instead, and we both turned in.

It is a mistake to indulge the spirit of prophecy too freely. The earlier prediction of west wind proved correct enough later on, but this last shot went wide of the target entirely. We awakened to a still grey dawn and a dead flat calm. I was stirring before the alarm had sounded; it was still only tick-tick-ticking busily when I turned out on deck to look about me.

There were faint wisps of grey mist here and there along the land, which looked remote in the greyness. The calm was stagnant, not a breath of air, not one faintest touch of rippled movement on the oily surface of the water. The mistiness gradually expunged the land altogether. It was slack-water.

"More work," I sang out into the cabin, "we've got to tow into the Blackwater tide. The tide here will take us up the Colne."

I was already getting the tow-rope fast and myself into the dinghy when he came out and took the helm. His look round about him satisfied him of the urgency, for after three or four initial yawns he took the sweep and helped us along with it.

A compass course is always troublesome when towing; but we were not far wrong. When we were safely over the division of tides, we left her to her own devices and went below for an overdue breakfast. She drifted westward with the tide. It was past eleven o'clock now, but the mist had not dissolved, and the shores were quite withheld.

Soon after noon, however, the first faint breaths were felt. The topsail and jib topsail had already been set, in order to exploit whatever little draught might breathe, for we were becoming restive as this tide of ours was fast flowing itself out and we were creeping and drifting only. The Mersea fishing fleet, becalmed also, were now all about us, the Nass Beacon soon abeam. Then the draught again quickened, and we were sailing.

At two o'clock the topsails were being tumbled off her fast, and the glass was tumbling perpendicularly. It was none too soon to shorten sail; she was roaring through the water, close-hauled to a south-westerly wind, and the lee rails were awash. She had two reefs down when, after a heavy beat against a rising gale, she reached her home port; and, as she rode to her mooring-chain, the elements turned themselves loose and made real riot. The barometer had fallen nine-tenths since yesterday.

X

DOWN ON THE BLACKWATER EBB

RISING easterly the wind was. After a fine afternoon, the breeze at nightfall was beginning palpably to stir; it came over the flats with a long sigh: soughing across the dark water, it lost itself again over the land to lee. Night had gathered, and as yet the yacht lay at her mooring, for the tide was still flowing. There was no sense in starting to beat out over a contrary tide when the tide would soon itself turn to help us. The ebb seaward would begin just after midnight. Therefore, still moored off Heybridge Basin, we had lighted the cabin lamp and made ourselves comfortable in that drowsily comfortable domain below, there to wait. We should be off at midnight.

Sailing down a dark tidal river on the ebb has an attraction all its own. Partly it derives its savour from the fact that one brief mistake brings reflection prolonged beyond the ordinary; if the deep channel is missed and the yacht touches, she stays there. The water will be streaming away eastward all the time, and she will soon be left, towering solidly from the plashy levels, ignobly high

and dry, and with nothing about her but miles of tide-forsaken banks.

Even by daylight it is no rare happening for a yacht to become a perverted example in this way. Through the glasses, before the light failed and the tide rose, we had been able to see two yachts listing forlornly on the mud lower down. Clearly they had gone aground in broad daylight. And there they were still.

The wind whimpered over the dark flats; rising in gusts, it possessed the darkness. To seaward of us some dark blur greyly moved. Materializing gradually, the dim loom of it took form as a barge. A barge, running free and barely distinguishable, slipped rapidly by under a merest corner of topsail only, and let go as she swung to the tide. The rattle of cable was heard; then—blown in snatches —vague sounds of work and bustle came to us across the grey water, and words, deep-throated. After that the blurred form of the barge rode to her anchor as if tenantless in the dark; the men had gone below.

Starlight now there was none, for this easterly wind had piled up a grey darkness of cloud over all the sky; and night was unmitigated. Full night it was when the sails were set, and at 12.15 by the clock the sheets were hauled home and the yacht began slipping through the dark water. The foam of her wake and the bow wave of the dinghy glimmered astern, greyly-white in the dark level. The water was ruffled and creased by the rising wind. Some other dark yacht, moored and tenantless,

TIDAL · FLATS · AT · MOONRISE.

seemed as if she slid by us as she was dropped astern; we were really under way.

Evidently that barge had been bound for the wharf by Salt Hall in Chigborough Creek. Had she been bound for Maldon, she would have held her course. Up through the darkness they come, mysterious dark-sailed objects, and work through the narrow fairway to Maldon, up to the old town where the lights of the Hythe and water-front tremble reflected in the broken sea-tides. The blur of misty gas-light from the old streets is beyond.

"Maldon River" they all call it, and not without

reason. Following the Blackwater up from the sea, those widely swept contours that contain the tide-way converge gradually, and the great spaces lessen. The land closes; the highway of the water narrows. That silver line is leading some whither, and has so led for nearly twenty centuries. Diffusiveness of sunlit landscape and of creeks fingering away aimlessly landward on each side is exchanged for the concentration and purpose of a slim waterway embanked and, at last, for the ancient town.

Clustering red-roofed up its hillside, Maldon is near kin of Rye. Like Rye also, Maldon is a town of departed supremacy. A Roman colony once, it became the chief seaport of Essex in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It has its mood of reverie, often enough, at twilight now, when brown dusk of the sunset is behind it. The barges' topmasts over the trees are slenderly-lined, beside the ancient church. Wreaths of chimney-smoke, blurring the west, will soften all the outlines. Then, at high water, there is sound of voices and clatter of blocks down at the water, and brown sails drift over; the fishing fleet is away with the tide.

Beside the Hythe the sprit-sail barges are warped nowadays, and the fishing fleet lies, listed landward, at top of a slope of beach. The tide, which has brought the ships in, goes seaward again and leaves them; the fairway is so shallow that it will barely float a dinghy; the long flat-bottomed local punts alone are adequate.

Often the yacht has herself listed over for one tide at Maldon, before she has slipped seaward

again on the next. And now she was away seaward too, turning to windward in the dark.

Just visible in that abiding last glimmer of greyness (for water is still grey though the land be solidly black), Hillypool Buoy slipped cluttering away astern of us, close at hand; and now—with long board and short—we began to beat down the Ware. The smacksmen may be able to do this successfully by some inherited instinct, but personally I make no boast and use the lead. And on a dark night even the smacksmen have sometimes sent a gruff word of inquiry through the dark. The yacht will be lying perhaps at anchor in the fairway.

"Where's the Ford Crik Buoy lay o' you?" comes a deep voice over the water, as the dark-sailed smack, unlighted and vaguely seen, if seen at all, slides by on the ebb.

"Ay, I see you're in the fairway, not the crik," it adds hoarsely. "You ain't far off the edge, where you'd lust over, come ebb. That's dark, that is. Yes, yes, snug you are, snug if it blowed heavens hard, easterly."

And the blur of sail is lost in the darkness.

As I say, I make no boast and use the lead. The channel just here is regular in contour, and the use of the lead is an indefectible guide and safeguard, when turning to windward, even on the darkest night.

Over the bows the flicker of a tiny yellow point of light glinted for a moment, and then darkness blotted it. Again the yellow star blinked, and

revealed itself as a swinging lantern, which, after swaying actively for a few moments, came to rest and so remained. One of the stranded yachts had kedged off into the channel at top of the tide; she was now riding to her anchor, and her skipper was just putting up the riding-light before he turned in. Heeling to the breeze, we cut a grey line through the tide towards her, and slipped close past her stern with the quick sound of the ripple and rustle of water that broke from our forefoot. The gleam of the riding-light shone on his figure and on the deck of the anchored yacht; it picked out the deck and cabin skylight, yellowly lit against the sheer background of night. We were by.

"Good-night. Fine breeze," came over the water in response to my own word; the darkness swallowed us and we were again away on port tack into the very soul of the night.

Like the smacksmen of these waters, we seldom trouble—unless virtuously inclined beyond the ordinary—to show side-lights on our night work here. Elsewhere one may be punctilious enough, but it feels more congruous in some obscure fashion to steal through the darkness of our own home-waters unlighted, being thus more intimately part of the dark scheme of night, which indifferently possesses its grey solitude of unseen water and wide salting. That—as I take it—is the fanciful portion of the excuse; the remainder is sheer laziness.

Ramping full, she was close-hauled. She was heeling more and more to the sturdy power of the breeze as she cut her long clean tracks, unseen,

across the deep-water channel. Northey Island itself had been passed, but the long mud spit, the Island Horse, was still stretching away under water on our starboard hand. That spit probably intercepts more yachts, to their own sorrow, than any other shoal in the Blackwater, but the lead unmasked it in the darkness and gave its position with the same certainty and precision as if it had been uncovered by the ebb and were visible in the sunlit day. The yacht stood away towards the Barnacle Horse and the island of Osea.

Reticent beyond its usual habit, the windward landscape had never a point of light upon it; shore-light or anchor-light, they had all gone to sleep, and darkness was unbroken. Ourselves, sailing unlighted in blindfold fashion, were at one with it all; and the wide inlet of the sea, this ragged-armed water-world, which now at high tide insinuated its long navigable creeks for miles landward in the darkness, was intimately about us. On such a night, if ever, it could yield its secrets.

Glimmering by farmsteads, dark among their trees, its tidal salt-water had furtively brimmed up and gathered, miles inland. Up to Maldon wharves, with their lights and clustering masts reflected, it had flowed—Maldon with its shore-murmur of life in the old waterside taverns. Secretly, by bend and curve and elbow, it had searched out its way—here to some lonely marsh forsaken in the night, there to some wharf in the countryside, grey-planked and rotten. The rutted track landward was the way of the shore-gang, and the same Essex

mud was grooved and furrowed by wheels of the farm-carts that took the crops of barrels to hiding "a hundred sleeping years ago."

Smugglers of a century or two ago, if they were on this yacht this very night, would have no difficulty in handling her gear; "a thought light" they might find it, and growl in their beards as they trimmed the sheets, but otherwise not very different from the gear that they too had used before they came to final anchorage themselves, in some overgrown village churchyard hereabouts. It was the growth of customs dues in the late seventeenth century which first stimulated import smuggling. In the grey unlighted years astern, were the tide but rising now, and our cabin and fo'c'stle crammed with little roped barrels, then

the sturdy fellow at the helm, the smuggler, booted and ear-ringed, would need no pilot to tell him the channel up Lawling Creek; he would hit the narrow entrance to a nicety, finding the whole face of things unchanged since he left it. And before daylight his cargo would be cellared away in some farm-building at Latchingdon or Mundon, and he himself seaward on the ebb, or safe at home, before the first grey streaks of dawn were over the Blackwater.

The face of the waters and contour of the fairway have perhaps changed but little; the quiet countryside, too, is untarnished by the centuries. But the ships of Maldon River, and Maldon town itself, are not as they were. While London of the old years, the white-walled capital, has been exchanged for a province of town upon town and city on city, Maldon has fared quite otherwise. While the Thames, in place of vanished galleys and frigates, has begotten that modern traffic of liners, this ancient Blackwater, once a place of stirring business, has lapsed to quietude. Where barges and smacks come only now, there were once the King's vessels of war. Norman ships, with their one sail, broadly striped, and their oar ports, or the old galleys of later years with shields and painted beak-heads, have cut their line of foam down Maldon River, and the long pennons have floated above them. Maldon town was a ringing shipyard. From its slipways came the galleys of the Plantagenets, the carracks of Queen Elizabeth's day, or the fourth-rates of the Republic. The

48-gun ship *Jersey* was launched at Maldon in 1654 and sailed away down this Blackwater tideway, bluff-bowed and sturdily rigged. She served with Blake in the Mediterranean, and carried the Maldon shipwrights' work to Guinea and the Indies.

The yacht was thrusting into the little dark waves and scattering their crests in spray. The water whipped across us out of the dark, it scattered like a little scurry of rain as she dipped and rose.

"Better keep the lead going," I said as we thrashed on port tack south-eastward, "the mud's wide and flat on this shore. The loom of the land is so vague it doesn't give a hint."

Those old craft have vanished. Yet the atmosphere and entourage are primitive enough even now to be fit setting for the earliest shipping of Maldon River. Through the thin mists of some still Blackwater dawn the old shields and steel caps might glimmer. Or the "Yuch-hey-saa-saa" of the Danes might echo as their snaky galleys, under the Raven, made landward towards the sundown. Northey and Osea Islands still bear their Danish names, and the Danish invaders were for ever haunting these long-creeked tidewater estuaries, even before they possessed the Danelagh by treaty and right. Up the dark tideway of to-night their long ships brought them in the year 991, and they met the Saxon defenders at Maldon. The battle is said to have lasted fourteen days. It was all a confused hubbub, half in the water and half out of it, with flights of arrows

FLAT CALM ON THE BLACKWATER

and clashing spear and broadsword. Then the hoarse shouts and strangled cries began to ebb landward, when Brihtnoth fell and the Saxons were in flight. The Dragon was down. The battle is mainly memorable by reason of its celebration in ancient Saxon verse. "Were it written," said Freeman the historian, "in any other tongue but the native speech of Englishmen, it would have won its place alongside the battle-songs of ancient Hellas."

If now, instead of having that tarry smuggler at the yacht's helm (as we put him in fancy a moment ago), we found some iron-limbed Danish sea-robber grimly watchful at the tiller, we should discover in him a less accustomed helmsman. Bracelets and corselet of the Earl would glimmer upon him, and the two-handed "goodly graven sword" would certainly be hitched to his belt, even while he stood at the helm. Superb seaman and instinctive navigator though he were, he would still marvel at the handiness of a modern yacht; turning to windward as at present, he would find her really uncanny. Evolution in boat building has not stood still since his day. The boat certainly has changed, but not so the water nor the seaman's art, and he would perhaps find the course and contour of the waterway nowise different from the old haven of his own Danelagh. And after a short mystified silence, he would soon be even handling the yacht as if he had known her all his life.

"Good job the Osea mooring-buoys have gone," came the voice from beside me in the dark cockpit, breaking my dreams.

"We found one of them useful enough," I chuckled, "that night after you'd pitched over into the drink."

"The drink" was merely the plentiful salt element about us, and not that other liquor scantily hoarded in a bottle. The mooring-buoys which the Admiralty had laid in the middle of the fairway off Osea were—to the yachtsman—something of a nuisance by day and a terror by night. Unseen in the dark, unless revealed by a lather of foam, they were capable of inflicting real damage. Sometimes, clogged with seaweed, one or two of them dragged wallowing to their cables in the strong tide, virtually submerged, and only breaking surface like a dolphin's back for a moment and then gone again. They are now happily gone for good; the place thereof knoweth them no more, nor does it desire to know them.

Their sole benefaction fell on this wise. The yacht had been beating up against a westerly wind that had gradually fretted and lashed itself into a gale. Close-reefed, she was working up well and truly. She went about off the hard beach near Osea Pier, having stood comparatively close inshore. "*Whoosh*," and the reefed foresail, which was backed to blow her head round, slit across and she missed stays. There was no space to try again nor even to wear, she was flying beam-wise ashore. The anchor was over in a second, and the two of us on the cable to take up the shock; my companion's foot caught as the cable snubbed and he was overboard, oilskins, sea-boots and all, in a second.

I can still see him, with his thigh-booted legs oaring in the ugly grey water as he bettered his grip on the cable. He was soon hauled in, with great wetness, out of the ditch, and I subdued and furled the flogging canvas while he poured the water out of his boots. But the yacht—safe at present—would be in danger of grave damage on the ebb, as she would take the hard bottom. A Sheerness lighterman, the only soul in evidence, came up and offered assistance. I sent him back for a good anchor (if he could find one) and a stout warp; the yacht's kedge would be inadequate, and we must somehow get her anchored further off-

shore. The good fellow returned with a sturdy anchor and a coil of wire rope. But try as we would we could not get that anchor laid out; the man and I lacked neither muscle nor experience, but we were puny against that fury of wind and water, and he—not in oilskins—was wet to the skin with spray. Then it was that the Royal Navy stepped in. A steam launch, manœuvring in as close as she dared, offered to put us on a mooring-buoy—an offer gladly accepted. The hawser was made fast, and we were towed off, attaching ourselves to that despised mooring-buoy by our anchor chain run through the ring. It was not a peaceful night.

To the Naval Mess (ashore in a large house on the Island) I paid my respects next morning and rendered thanks. "Pretty lively last night for you, eh? Thought the windows here were going to be blown in; that little boat of yours must have stood on her head." Beyond noticing that the cabin was abnormally active and rebellious while the steak and onions were being cooked, we had been little conscious of this alleged ill-behaviour. Afterwards, tired out with the wind, we had slept like logs.

Here again to-night, with the perverse wind in the opposite direction, we were plugging to windward once more. It would be quite likely that —unlighted like ourselves—some of the Maldon smacks might be trawling in this water. The ground off Osea is favourable, and the Maldon men grumbled in their deep throats when their liberty of trawling was curtailed because Osea had become a Naval base during the War. "Hunderds o'

pounds worth o' fish in there, and us chaps mustn't touch 'em." But the oppression is now removed. For that reason our eyes sought jealously to probe the darkness as we slashed our long course across the deep-water gut. But the trawling ground was empty to-night.

Between the East Point of Osea Island and the smooth mainland shore the deep channel is contracted into a narrow passage, through which the ebb tide sluices with remarkable conviction. When —as to-night—the wind is scurrying up in the opposite direction with equal confidence, a disputation between the two elements arises, and the boat-sailor finds himself involved in the argument. The waves are steep and ill-natured; but we pounded through them with little more display than a few resolute showers of scud, sheets of spray that tingled on the face and rattled on the oilskins. To smaller boats, this "gut" can be a formidable passage.

Visible merely as a shapeless hump, vague on the shore-line, the farm buildings at Stansgate could just be identified. This land also has its story, the gentler appeal of

> "Meadows breathing of the past
> And woodlands holy to the dead,"

for the subdued landscape over the starboard bow was the land of Stansgate Abbey, a Clugniac Priory dating from 1176, and neither smuggler nor sea-robber should so fitly haunt the wind-fretted darkness here as those sorrowful figures of the monks,

grey and pallid and ghostly enough in their age and poverty. Wolsey had turned them all adrift on suppression of the monastery. It had been a rich place, with field and wood of nearly two thousand acres; but little is left. A portion of the ancient walls is incorporated in the farm buildings, and until recently a stone coffin was used as a water-trough in the farmyard. Abbey and monks and fat manors alike have faded into the shadows.

This stirring weather, apt enough and tunable with memories of Dane and smuggler, was less in harmony with the ghosts of Stansgate, be they gracious or sorrowful. Had some still starlit night, with a soft breeze, favoured our going, we might easily have stolen seaward ghost-like ourselves. But there were too much strain and rattle, too much battering of broken water, too much *noise*, *noise*, for the delicate character. These steep little waves in the dark, maned with grey spume, were no phantoms, and the bows that met them were solid wood. *Thud* came the wave, and with a *whish* there followed the torn shower of spray, flying aft as the staunch bows battered through it; the foam glistened in the dark on each side of us, thrown back from the little tumult at the bows.

The chief obstacle here would be Thurslet Spit. If a vessel lays a straight course from Tollesbury Pier to Osea—a failing to which many power-boats (including tugs) have shown themselves innocently prone—she is likely to locate the exact

position of the shoal with unexpected precision. Also, should the tide be ebbing, she will have considerable leisure. A full-bodied hull, like that of a steamer, will take the mud comfortably; and the ship will sit there, tide-forsaken and high up in the world, suffering little save in point of dignity; but a yacht of the plank-on-edge type will debase herself so utterly as to make her master swear firmer allegiance to his chart for the future.

Discreetly anxious ourselves, lest we be a sorry spectacle at peep of dawn, for admonition of others, we watched our course with jealousy; we were frankly glad when the position of that troublesome whale-backed spit had dropped astern. In the meantime we turned to windward in the main tide-way. The water would be less rough when this bustle of seaward tide had relented, but for the present it was steeply-broken; the waves *thumped*, *thudded*, against us. The short ugly sea on the weather-going tide is characteristic; it is apt to be much more disconcerting than the open sea outside, where the waves are longer and less steep. And in the darkness, rough water seems rougher.

"Jib flown," I shouted.

I could barely see it; but, dominating the noise of the wind and water, the sound forward was unmistakable. "*Thurra*, *thurra*, *thurra*, *thrash*, *thrash*, *thrash*, *thurra*, it sounded alternately as it flapped and then flogged and then flapped again. A sail thrashing in that way is apt to tear, and I was out of the cockpit in a moment. It is my belief that I am always careful when the yacht is bucking and

plunging like this; I pass myself cautiously from the runner to the shrouds, more especially at night; but somehow my foot slipped on the wet deck and down I went with such headlong completeness that I positively struck the rail with my *mouth*. It was due to no virtue of mine that I did not furnish a case for the doctor, or perhaps even for the coroner. In precisely this way the casualty which was classed during the War as "missing" can so easily arise. Things happen rapidly at night. I was chatting to a fisherman at Maldon whom I have known for years, and I had the ill-fortune to inquire after his son, a promising lad who had just turned twenty. "He run forrard to the jib-sheet in a squall one night, and we never see him go over and never see him agen. He had his sea-boots on."

In the meantime our own jib was thrashing and snapping like a demented whip-lash somewhere up in the night. It was adrift at the clew, for the sheet was still cleated. Any job is difficult when the deck is trying to turn itself at every possible angle at once, and the jib will not gracefully descend of its own accord when the halliard is slacked; it waits to be pulled. The clew was tossing itself out of reach in the darkness; even if caught and pulled, the sail would promptly pull the puller into the ditch; and it was for that reason that I was grovelling down at the bows and identifying the right cleat by touch. The traveller-inhaul would soon bring the rebel in. So the sail was re-sheeted and re-set.

The red light on the port hand would be Tollesbury Pier; its area of visibility is limited. By this time it was two o'clock in the morning and there was an isolation in the wind-scoured night that allied one more closely for the moment to the obscure forces of nature than to the gloss of civilization. That darkness of the past, interminable shadow, becomes almost oppressive at moments. The province is there of "eternal process moving on" which denuded the land and fertilized it with plant and beast. One can fancy, almost with a shudder, this dark estuary surrounded by a wilderness of swamp or heath or forest, a place of inacces-

sible wildness under the clouded night, and untrodden except by the wicked-eyed brutes that haunted it. Then that obscene caricature of man, creeping in the dark places with his stone axe, began the strange course of evolution which has altered the whole face of the habitable earth.

Earth and its dark waters cover up the broken relics. Yet both alike will sometimes return them, a prey to curious eyes. The trawl or dredge brings them up. So here, out of the keeping of these dark waters, strange objects have been brought. The dredge will perhaps bring up a barnacled vase, once a thing of unsullied beauty, virginal from the hands of some Roman craftsman. There it has lain, for space of twenty or thirty short lives as his—left with the rubbish and changing life of the sea-bottom, and now brought to light once more. Or hints of life more ancient yet are disclosed. A stone axe-head, an elephant's skull, a mammoth's tusk, brought from the same hiding-places, each has had its own place in the forlorn distances of the past.

The white light ahead would be the riding-light of a barge at Bradwell Creek mouth. Bradwell itself, lying at the back of Peewit Island, had extinguished its last bead of lamplight long ere this. And the little place has often in the past been obtrusively and virtuously asleep in the dark nights of a century ago. Tradition persistently associates the "Green Man" at Bradwell with the smugglers, but there seems to be no picturesque deed of daring or wickedness recalled. Perhaps the smugglers were too crafty or

the revenue officers too clumsy. Smugglers are said to have been armed "with swingels, like flails, with which they can knock people's brains out." But evidently at Bradwell they were content to leave the brains unknocked; had they succeeded in emptying a head or two and strewing the brains untidily on deck and gunwale, the story would certainly have been hoarded in memory and declared through the centuries with local pride and unction. In later days Bradwell would have been an ill-chosen venue for the smuggler, for a revenue cutter was permanently stationed there before the first hulk was established at Stansgate.

Until 1831 the Coast Blockade was charged with the duty of frustrating the smugglers; the Blockade was then succeeded by the Preventive Water Guard, out of which grew the Coast Guard. The early revenue men lived in hulks, stranded on the shore, like that old hulk previously at Stansgate. Before 1870 it was the *Richmond;* then it was the Watch Vessel (W.V. 21) which one used to know. But it too has now gone.

Despite their sins of violence, the old-fashioned smugglers enjoy quite as great a share of modern sympathy as the harassed revenue men; few of us but chuckle at their finer misdeeds. It was in its way an achievement (and I believe that the fact is well authenticated) to prevent service from being held in a church one Sunday morning by the compelling argument that the pews were full of kegs and the pulpit filled up with tea. They are picturesque enough figures in memory, with their

" crops " of barrels, their ready cutlasses and their midnight flittings. They have gone.

The old fancy for free-trading, however, is not yet dead.

" No, no," said an old coastguard of these waters to me some years ago, " there's some on 'em tries it yet."

I spoke vaguely of the prosaic adventurer on the packet-boats.

" I've heerd the class of 'em," he admitted. Then he looked squarely round at me.

" What'd you say of a yacht, like as one might say the white yawl out there? She sail about, same 's you gemmen will; chance times she go furrin, and come in, cleared all right enough. That's all c'rrect."

His eye wandered off to the causeway for a moment, and then he recalled himself to his story with a slow smile.

" One dark night a boat come ashore at the hard. Same 's anyone might. Me and my mate we heard her keel a-gratin' as she touched, and thought nothin'. But we jes' hailed her."

The old fellow looked mischievously at me and lowered his voice confidentially, but he spoke with emphasis. " We hailed her, as I sez. Now he was a fool; *he didn't answer.* If he'd a-called up, ' That you, Bill? ' or summat nat'ral that way, we sho'ent have tuk no heed. *But he didn't answer.* And we found 'em, sweating their guts out to git two packin'-cases up. Two packin'-cases. All contraband."

A revenue officer, young and unwise, who came aboard the yacht elsewhere told a yarn to a quite different purpose. Smart in his blue reefer and gold braid he sat in the cockpit and lit up his cigarette.

"Funny dodges they're up to," he said, between the initial puffs of smoke.

By his own account he was a past-master of detection; and he ingenuously sketched a groundwork for us of the science of subterfuge and evasion.

"Easily done," he concluded. "Now I went the other side on holiday last year. I wanted to see if their chaps were as fly as us; we may get told off by the public because we're a set of duds and all that tosh; but we know a thing or two." He told it all in his graceless modern slang. Happily for his own reputation and future chances of State service, he was not detected; and in pride and virtue he strutted on the continental soil with a large bottle, neck downwards, impeding each leg of his nether garments.

Close past the anchored barge we thrashed, and turned seaward on a long board into the darkness eastward. Not a glimmer of light was visible anywhere; it was empty and desolate night. The seas, as we began to leave the confinement of the estuary astern, were easier, and the tacks were long; the dark sea-horizon beyond Sales Point would be opening, for now at last the beams in the sky from the Swin Middle and other sea-lights began to be seen. An hour slipped by, and another hour. It would soon be dawn.

In the meantime it was difficult to locate our exact position, and some precision would be needed, as the free space between the Knoll, Bench Head and Bar Shoals is not generous, and the old N.W. Knoll Buoy (which would have solved all difficulties) has been extinguished. The sea was sufficiently rough to infuse a spice of anxiety into the problem: it would not do to come down with a bump on any of these shoals.

For that reason the first faint glimpse of the little stabbing point of light of the Colne Point Buoy was welcome. One fixed mark on a dark night is precious. Steering by compass was well-nigh impossible, for this seaway had so far demoralized the compass-card as to make it barely worth consulting. It sometimes failed but little of swinging round the complete circle.

In the ordinary course cross-bearings from the Colne Point and Knoll Buoys would have given the position. But the Knoll was not yet visible. Later on I could see it by climbing the mast; but it was still invisible from deck level, and a bearing was impossible. This was in some measure an anxiety, for the east wind was bringing up a sea, we were thrashing and pitching on through the night with shoals on three hands in close proximity, and I was a trifle shaky as to my exact position. I was making for the Colne, as it was useless to go further against this wind without the help of tide.

"Dawn."

"Yes, it's certainly coming. Pretty desolate it looks too."

It was all iron-grey and bitter cold. Nothing was visible but the grey broken sea.

"Let her come now," I sang. If we steered north, I computed, we should just reach up between the shoals.

The mainsheet was eased off, and she romped away northward. Unable to get a reliable compass-bearing, I was frankly worried. Both shoals are hard, the sea was rough. If only it were light enough for us to see the buoys! Off the wind, she was sailing really fast; yet it seemed a long time, and she *must* now be level with the shoals.

"What's that?"

A rounded object was heaving and tossing some distance away on the port hand, indistinct in the grey half-light. It was the Bench Head Buoy. We had hit the channel right in the middle, and were now raging in through the deep-water channel to the Colne.

Under shelter of Colne Point we anchored. Bound coast-wise as we were, the tide would now be against us for six hours. As the grey dawn coldly broadened into day we turned in, to sleep out the contrary tide.

XI

IN AND OUT OF MERSEA QUARTERS

WE decided to shift. The wind, which had been blowing a gale from the south, was veering westerly, though its force had hardly yet moderated. Anchored in the Blackwater, off Steeple Stone, we had escaped its main riot hitherto, but this touch of west was making the yacht unhappy. She ducked, she wallowed and rolled.

"Get the anchor, first?"

We were both of us lurching as we moved on the unsteady deck, slippery with water. The raw wind bit, and the clouds that swept over were sullen and grey.

"Yes. And then little jib only. We'll tie up reefs in the main as we go."

Round she spun as the slip of sail filled, and away. Not another ship was in sight on all the wide grey estuary, and the wind creased and tattered the rebellious waves about us. So fast she scudded under that shred of canvas that the reefs were little more than tied and ready when she was put into the wind off the Nass Beacon and the reefed mainsail set. She flung the spray about her in a deluge

as soon as she was turned to windward. She drove her bowsprit deeply into the waves as she pitched; the whole bowsprit disappeared in a smother of foam. Then the water suddenly quieted. She had gained the shelter of the long tidal bank of the Nass, and was entering Mersea Quarters.

As, close-hauled, she sailed up the Quarters, a little scatter of rain and hail swept over with a rattle, and went by. Lee ho! She filled again, and cut across the Channel close astern of one of the anchored yachts, and athwart the bowsprit of another, and then—under the weather-shore—she let go. In complete shelter, she floated rock-steady.

West Mersea is a place of abundant anchorages, though its freedom is somewhat restricted by the oyster-grounds. Anchoring in Salcott Channel or between Cobmarsh and Packing Marsh Islands is prohibited, and the town-anchorage above the islands is so full of ships and boats as to afford little space for the stranger. But it is always possible to find a snug spot; and the low tongues of land and the tidal banks soon stretch themselves to windward as one sails in from the sea, and make a great calm. Of all winds that blow, the south-east is the only mannerless intruder, the sole wind which really throws everything into disorder.

This array of long-fingered creeks, stretching landward in three pairs, has been variously exploited. The Romans cultivated oysters at Mersea, and anchored their war-galleys in its waters; Hasten, the robber Dane, anchored his ships in the fleets,

or laid them in mud berths, while he wintered on Mersea Island.

Then, years and years later, the smugglers slipped from seaward under cover of night, and, noiselessly disappearing up some one of these creeks, would load their crops of barrels (with suppressed oaths and hard breathing) into the farm cart which waited at an isolated farm wharf in the darkness. Fierce-eyed and primitive, the "free-traders" were ready for the boat's crew of the revenue officer. On one occasion they grimly beheaded the whole crew, and so left them in the boat. It happened here at Mersea. They, too, with their swingels and cutlasses, their crops and their hides of barrels, have vanished from these waters; the tides that flood in to brim over the saltings have ceased to float their

cargoes, and the strong ebbs swirl seaward without them. Now the oyster-dredgers are in sole possession —save for the yachts that come and go, and the sprit-sail barges that search out the twisted courses of the upper creeks now and again to some remote farm wharf to embark a load of hay.

The oyster-dredgers, cutter-rigged, are anchored in a long line up Thorn Fleet and along Besom Fleet. If it be high water in the grey half-light of the dawn, one's dreams may be shattered by a gruff voice close at hand; then, peering sleepy-eyed from the cabin, one sees a brown-sailed smack passing the yacht almost within arm's reach; seaward, a few sails are dwindling away towards the Nass; and up in Thorn Fleet there is the rattle and clatter of cables, and sound of ropes rendering through blocks as sails are hoisted. Smack after smack disentangles herself from the group and glides smoothly away seaward after the others. Under the grey dawn there is a subtle quality of strangeness in the whole blurred seascape. The riding-lights of the yachts, unextinguished as yet, are palely yellow, reflected in that smooth heave of the water. The smacks are by this time grouped distantly on the seaward horizon; even the last straggler has gone and the Quarters are again silent.

Out there, when they have reached their grounds and have hauled the head-sail sheets a-weather, the men will be busy enough pulling up their dredges and sorting the cultch. Unweariedly they haul the dredges up, and toss them overboard—rain,

hail or shine. Then at last with a single inspiration, when the day's work is over, dredges are discarded on deck, and sheets trimmed, and the fleet—stringing out in a long picturesque array—will be laying course for the Nass, with the green water breaking away in a lather of foam from sturdy bows.

In the afternoon the dinghy's sail was hoisted and she sailed up Mersea Channel to the causeway at Mersea City.

"Don't you bother 'bout that, sir; young Bill, he'll shift the anchor up, he will."

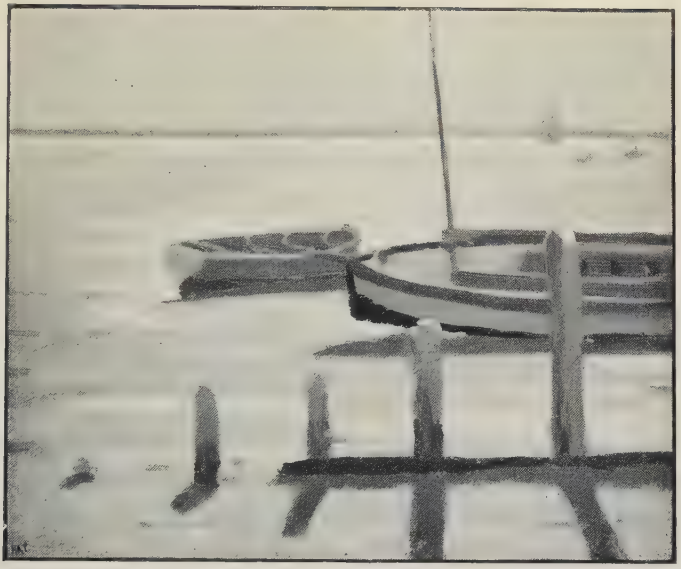
An oyster-dredgerman, an old yacht-hand, was standing beside me as I began to haul the dinghy shoreward, and we paced up the causeway together. In fact we had reached his kitchen before he had finished what he was saying. He was an old acquaintance, and we went in together.

"Come a proper rough wind, suthard, happen he'd a-lost his yacht, bein' he was on a lee shore. Put her on hard up top t' Coccum. When I first see him holdin' on same's that, 'He ain't no call a-standin' there,' I sez to my mate. 'Beggared he ain't gwine on.' Dirty weather too. But the wind took off, *that* did, and he got her floated."

"Ammichures," his wife interjected, by way of explanation.

His brow knit, just the flicker of a frown. The word and its pronunciation were his own, I knew; but he uses it charily when speaking to the "young gemmen."

"It sticks in my mind," I wickedly replied, "that I saw a barge in a remarkably funny position in



THE SEA SHORE AT LOW TIDE

Salcott Channel the other day—half dried-out. Hadn't she a pilot on board?"

His face fell the least trifle. "Yes, one of our chaps *wes* there. But it don't make no count. Not there. All soft stuff. Now" (and his voice had a suspicion of haste) "you know that tall gemman come down here in li'l green yacht, well, he sail off Burnham way. Got on the Buxey, *he* did. He dried out, and some of us see the weather weren't up to much, and asked him if he'd want a hand pit aboard. 'G'on,' he sez, 'I'm comfable enough up here, I'm all right.' 'Go t' hell' was wot he *did* say. Then it come on t' blow. The weather come it over him proper. Then she started for t' drag. Some of us weren't fur off, and I got near to hail 'im. 'Can't you pit a hand aboard?' he hollers. 'No, I can't,' I sez back, 'and he couldn't do no good if I did. I'll get off to Burnham for somethin' under power, if you want. I allow you'll be in a tidy mess if this wind hold.' 'Gawdsakes, get on with it,' he sez. I looked up at the sky as my ole smack reach up Burnham River, and I say to my mate, 'That'll blow,' I said."

He paused, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Well?" I inquired, expecting a dramatic climax. But his interest in the matter had evaporated; evidently the motor-boat had then occupied the centre of the stage, and he had passed out of the picture.

"Got off? Yes, yes. Brass up he had to; that's all. Pretty heavy, they tell me."

His wife looked up from the pudding which she was mixing, and nodded. "Ammichures," she said.

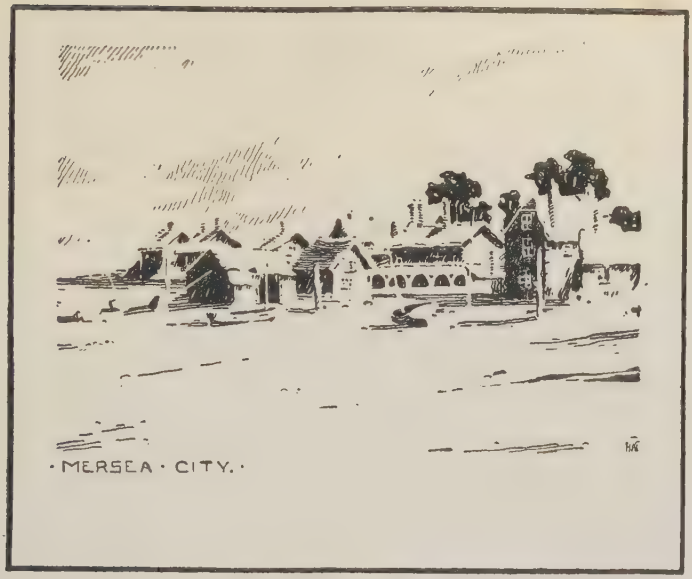
I took a turn up and down outside, and looked at the grey grass over-blown by wind and at the salt pools, and the few ships, tide-forsaken, that were listing over. One barge was unloading on the beach, and I stepped back into the kitchen as a thought struck me.

"Who brought the barge in on Thursday?" I asked him. "Coal barge, wasn't it?"

"You see me? Yes, yes, coals. I brought her in Thursday. Wonnerful little tide it were, too. Times, 'tain't too easy. The channel it ain't none too wide, and you can't always keep in the best of it."

Easy or no, he had brought her in, and there she lay on the shore now, with the carts coming and going, and the coal-dust drifting in the air, while the black basket was hoisted on the pulley time after time. The tip-carts creaked and lurched as they jolted up the foreshore, with their black freight for the cellars of Mersea City.

On one occasion I had asked this same smacksman to declare the secrets of his pilotage, and had thus set him adrift, nothing loth, in a perfect torrent of explanation. "Peldon Church, you kip it on with the shed, Peldon Church, you kip it . . ." he said; but I have quite forgotten now how you "kip" it, for it was a dozen years ago, and I have entered and left the Quarters for years both before and after without troubling myself



overmuch about Peldon or its church. Both, indeed, have often been invisible.

Then I fetched an ordnance map (which is more useful than any chart for small-boat work in the creeks), and asked him to show me how he worked out his course by the shore-marks. The map baffled him completely. He could make nothing of it. He brushed the map aside. "As I was sayin', Peldon Church, you kip it . . ."

Outside, one of the coal-carts clattered, and a man passed with a water-breaker poised on his shoulder. Children, bare-legged, were dabbling confusedly in the distance down at the waterside.

It was a grey afternoon, somehow characteristic of Mersea—with the sea-gulls that wheeled over the grey grass and tidal beach, and the wind that sang. I turned to go.

"Did you see me last week, beating down off Sales Point?" I asked him as an afterthought. "I went about just beside your smack."

He looked blank.

"I waved to you," I explained, "and you all three waved back."

"There's so many waves a hand," he ruminated, doubtfully. Then he brightened. "But I think of you the other day," he continued. "Sketchin'. I see a gemman takin' the ole barge, unloadin'; very nice too. He'd got her draw'd in very pretty-like, colour an' all, but I tell you wot he hadn't got. He hadn't put in no moorin' ropes. Drift away next tide, *she* would. That's a rum 'un if she don't."

"Ammichures," was again the explanation from the pudding basin, though this time with less obvious relevance.

Returning on board in the windy darkness, while the few lights of Mersea dwindled away astern of the dinghy, I was now back on the yacht in the night anchorage. The wind had foregone its anger; it still came with a *whoop* and a *whish* out of the dark, but it had relented from yesterday's mood of tearing savagery. Landlocked here, it was a pleasure to have this whining wind for companion, and to feel the *swoop* of it as some gust went by. But the night would be inhospitable

enough on the fringes of the shoals outside. Seen only in the darkness as a thin line of grey foam, the waves *thump* on their edges and thrash themselves into a confusion of spume. There the hard sand lurks, unseen, declared only by the broken water. The smugglers of old time were ruffianly fellows enough, especially when they did to death the King's officers; but the wreckers, they also operated in the old dark nights from this old Mersea, and they were things of coarser and colder brutality. A grim cast of mind must theirs have been; they could lure the ship aground, into the dark boil and smother round the shoals, then shut off the false lantern, and sleep snug abed. When the sea had moderated, it would be time enough to board her.

Alone among the winds and the darkness as we lay, the night was real. At last, reluctant still and lingering, we turned below. The lamp was bright in the cabin.

Landward or seaward the waters lead from Mersea Quarters. There are the grass-bordered creeks where—as the tide gradually floods in and creeps upward on smooth faces of the mud—the small boat can search her way landward, to Salcott and Virley, to Tollesbury, or up to the Strood. The Strood is the embanked roadway which connects Mersea Island with the mainland, and is of Roman origin.

As the tide rises, the view from the small boat—a view which had previously embraced only the blue water in the "fleet," the long flats, bird-haunted, and the broken edges of the land—

becomes more ample. As she sails landward with the flowing tide, trees and farms and churches are made visible; the sunlit landscape of the countryside is there. The blue water, at full tidal level, brims unbroken between grassy bank and bank, and she sails level with the world. Into creeks and alleys innumerable these outriders of the salt sea wander away and hide, lost behind the marshy islands. Then the embanked walls draw nearer about one and narrow the channel; a farm wharf is passed. A square church tower above the trees shifts and re-shifts its position as the boat doubles and returns round elbow and corner of the creek. It is Salcott. A wooden footbridge forbids progress, and there is an ivied ruin somewhere in the greenness—Virley.

The tide, turned seaward again, will forsake these quiet places. A plash of mud between the steep banks will be its channel, derelict. Seaward therefore, as the tide gurgles greedily away, the boat must follow, sinking gradually, gradually as the water ebbs, until the long landscape is lost, and she is once more below the banks.

So, into every creek of these waters, my little boat has penetrated. With full tide, at some quiet spot, whether at Salcott or Old Hall or Tollesbury here, or St. Osyth or Fingringhoe from the Colne, I have stretched my legs an hour or so ashore, and then, away as the tide ebbs, have gained once more the authentic deeps where the yacht lies at anchor, and her bows, landward pointed, divide the flat slipping water of the ebb.

Clustered at its water-side, the old houses of West Mersea stand. Mersea City they still call it. Leaning gable and crazy chimney are there, with moss-grown uneven roofs. Sail-loft and boat-builders' shed are ancient and decayed, and the spring-tides wash to the very doors. Then, receding over the grey grass of the saltings, the tide lays bare the brown flat, and narrows the creek to a ribbon of water. The nearer boats list over, stranded—with their masts leaning—and this salt wind ruffles the salt pools that the tide has left behind it.

"Lunnon?" said the old man in the shed, looking appreciatively through the cobwebbed ruin of window, "I don't hold with 'un."

He watched some dinghy down at the causeway; it curved alongside and the sail was lowered. Then his eyes came back to his whetted tool and his bench "cluttered up" with shavings.

"Never was out o' Mersea Island in me life, 'cept one day I went to Southend. Nor me father wasn't afore me."

He looked at me genially through his indoor spectacles. No boor, but a thoughtful and competent man, he was none the less set as firmly on Mersea soil as was the rusted anchor outside his own shed-door, and he was in his way as primitive as the grizzled shellback who smoked his pipe at Bradwell Waterside opposite and watched the barges unloading in the old days.

"Schule?" said the latter, with a flourish of his stumpy clay pipe. "Schule?" he repeated with a note of contempt. "I never had no *schulin'*, 'cept only three days. And only one word they larned me. Mud. M-U-D, mud. And I've bin stickin' in it ever since."

He looked up, with a grin, almost impish, on his mahogany face. Then his eyes returned to the waterside.

"Jarge," he called to the sturdy fellow who was backing his horse and cart into the water beside the barge, "wonnerful big tide to-day, ain't it? Nor' wind, I reckon."

West Mersea, grey in the misty dawns, West Mersea, coloured and murmuring in the sunshine, West Mersea in the twilight drowsy and brown, it is a city elect. The island is disfigured on the seaward side by modern buildings; and, worse than all, by those "huts" which now make every seaside place hideous, as seen from the sea. But the old city still remains undesecrated. May it remain.

Landward and seaward the waters lead from Mersea Quarters, and most of all one's tracks are seaward. It was on a dark morning in April that,

indisposed to linger at anchor though the wind was like a knife, we set sail for sail's sake, bound nowhere. The wind was north-east, and seemed quarrelsome; we had pulled down two reefs in the mainsail. Away the yacht scudded to the Nass Beacon and eastward, and the white water seethed and bubbled in her wake.

Outside, after Mersea Island had been dropped astern, and the Clacton coast opened, the sea was ugly. The black north-easter is no friend of mine. It was pitching up these short steep waves so steeply that every one of them "topped," just like a shore-breaker. In strange waters the waves would have been frightening, for, by appearance, they were certainly shoal. But we knew here that our soundings were perfectly virtuous, although shoal in plenty straggled away on our lee.

The waves hammered us and threw us about. The green water pounded on board, and washed to and fro. The spray, slit from every wave, smothered us in driven deluges. The spray was cold from the winter-cold sea, and the wind on face and hands made it colder.

The wind, open of the land, was of gale force. Without knowing it, we had blundered out into a real official gale. The staunchness and capacity of a small yacht in heavy weather is satisfying; her confidence in the seaway—her quick adaptability. Over the full sea she lifts gracefully and slides, in the steep sea she pounds sturdily; she meets the short vicious buffet of the wave with a quick thrust of her own, running her bows—if need be—clean

through the crest of it. She tears the white mane to spindrift, and tosses the spray up to her cross-trees. The wave retaliates, it flings all the weight it can on board—the green water breaks and gurgles and sluices. The yacht shakes herself and lifts, pouring it away through the scuppers. And so the conflict continues.

" Enough is as good as a feast," I quoted, when we were off Clacton, two miles seaward of the town. My hand on the tiller was numb with the cold. " Enough is as good as a feast," I repeated, and I shut my mouth to escape a mouthful.

We were only out for a morning's sail; Clacton had been named before we started, Clacton was abeam, and we therefore doubled on our tracks.

The seascape had that familiar foam-covered greyness of the east coast, with its heaving wave-crests in long succession and its flat grey shore-line, low along the wave-broken horizon. Ranged on that distant coast-line Colne-wards were the old martello towers, coastal defences of more than a century ago. Long out-dated now, they were objects of veneration and complacence when built —the new martello tower, " the form of which is circular, the walls being of vast thickness, faced with hard Scotch stone, so as to be bomb proof." Greyly set along the sky-line, sentinels no longer, they are things of the past.

The wind was rampant and we were left to solitary enjoyment of it. Not another ship under sail or steam could at the moment be discerned; in point of fact (as we discovered later) we had for companion

the Clacton life-boat, which was just setting off in response to a message of distress from the Maplin. There, as officially reported, "during a strong N.E. gale with a heavy sea" she found "a yacht in sore straits, badly knocked about, and her dinghy smashed up. The party on board were taken into the life-boat and later landed at Southend."

In weather like this, one's enjoyment is entirely conditioned by the degree of confidence in the yacht's gear. If a chafed sheet or worn halliard is on one's conscience, now is the time when the default is written in letters of red. There is no pleasure then. Every shred of hemp and manilla

aloft and alow is straining, board-tight, and the parting of one rope may mean disaster. So long as her gear holds, the yacht will do all that you ask of her. But if anything goes, and she falls out of control for a matter of minutes pending repair, the speed of her sag to lee in this wind will be prodigious. A glance to leeward shows the smother of foam boiling at edge of the shoals. She would be a strong yacht that would survive a shore-berth there to-day.

With the wind on her quarter, the yacht drove. Under lee of the Bar shoal the sea was less vigorous, but down the Colne Channel it was heaping and breaking with conviction. Though the wind was still on the yacht's quarter, the sea here was on her beam, and she edged her way skew-wise towards each crest, straightening out her course on the windward roll, and then luffing towards the next wave. But the roll was very heavy. The boom, with its long burden of reefed sail, was of necessity flogging the waves as she rolled to lee, and the depth of the roll was almost alarming.

"*Thud*"—then clutter of water and whish of the wind,—"*thud*"—pause again, and then,—"*thud-thud.*"

It was something on board adrift; it was no piece of cabin furniture loose; one or two clashings and janglings had occurred, but they were easily distinguishable and harmless. This sounded formidable.

"I don't know what it is," I shouted, "but it's aft, I fancy."

"Forrard," he yelled in reply. He yelled, though he was within a few feet of me, for the wind whipped our words to ribbons. "Is it the mast?"

Good-bye, if so. No, the weather-shrouds were straight and firm as rods of iron, and the lee-shrouds were not sagging unduly. Runners and stay were firm; there was no play on the mast.

"*Thud . . . thud . . . thud-thud.*"

"We've got to locate it," I said, as a sharp roll almost unwedged me and sent me tumbling; it threw the yacht nearly on her beam-ends.

Then my eye fell on the smaller water-breaker, set on bearings at the side of the well. Loosened by the roll, it was thud-thudding, and the mercy was that it had not thudded loose and (full of water) dropped cross-wise on one's legs and broken them. At the time of happening, the discovery was a relief; on paper, I confess it is an anti-climax.

We were past the Bench Head now, and the sea had moderated.

"*Crack.*"

This latest sound—sharp as a pistol-shot—invited attention, but its origin was not in doubt. The dinghy had been towing on two stout painters, each on one quarter of the yacht. One of them had snapped. As, however, the other held and we were through all the worst of it, the matter was of no consequence. With unusual consideration, the accident had been deferred until it was innocuous.

With the dinghy up-ended, as she followed slashing through the white water astern, we went roaring up the Blackwater.

"Better to feel there's a soft mud shore to lee instead of hard sand a day like this," I purred as I loosened the collar of my oilskin. We were still moving like a railway train, but the spray was not flying. The short bout had been exhilarating, but rather too strenuous for complete enjoyment. The yacht rounded to the wind close under Osea Island and let go her anchor in complete shelter.

"Look at the dinghy."

Forlorn little object, she had evidently been full of water in the heavy seas outside, and had been spilling it out over her stern as she towed. Now, at rest, she was almost out of sight. Just the top of her gunwale above the water traced her shape; she was completely waterlogged.

"Along o' Wullet Spitway, I doubt you cobbed it suthen rough," a smacksman said, whom I met ashore Maldon-way, and he nodded appreciatively towards the clouded easterly horizon. He was not far wrong.

"What a day shall bring forth" is a matter proverbially unknown. For the casual sailing of a morning, that north-easter, noisy and tyrannical, may hold evil things in ambush, or winds may be faint and waters blue.

Merely shifting from Mersea to the Colne, unhurried, the yacht broke out her anchor. With a fair wind she slid down the Quarters; so light was the breeze that the mist had never left the distances, though the sun shone and the sea was blue about us. The Nass Beacon went smoothly astern, and she sailed alone in her mist-rimmed circle of blue water.

Here, a mile off-shore, was all the mystery of sea-distances. We were alone with the blue salt water. Steered by compass she skirted the shoals, and slipping between the Coccum Hills and the Bench Head, she entered the Colne.

Somewhere in the mist to landward was the site of that " inconsiderable forte in the isle of Mersey " which the Royalists held in the Civil War. Long-booted and steel-helmeted, the halberdier on guard looked out across at the two Royal ships anchored companionably in the Colne. But other eyes were also upon the Royal ships at anchor. Fairfax had come down into Essex, and he it was who sent Sankey's Dragoons into Mersea. After a fight gallant on both sides the blockhouse was captured, and its guns silenced. Then three ships of the Parliament sailed Colne-ward, and attacked. The Royalist ships likewise fell prey to the Parliament.

The yacht let go her anchor in Pyefleet Creek, at the east end of Mersea Island. The warm summer day faded away to sundown, and the anchor-lights of the drifters and of the shipping in the Colne began to twinkle in the windless twilight. The water under the sunset was dusky orange, darkening to brown. It was night.

XII

COLNE TIDEWATER AND COLNE MUD

"NOT hopeful, that. It's a very watery sun." We both scanned the solar countenance with eyes of suspicion. A film of cloud was drawn over the whole sky; and the sun, visible through it, was watery yellow. This wind had brought a suspicion of rain; full from the nor'-west, it furrowed the grey surface of "Burnham River." The March afternoon was cold, and the landscape stolid and leaden.

The yacht had casually entered the Crouch from Mersea this morning; she would shortly drop down seaward again, bound for the Colne.

The fleet of yachts at moorings had not yet swung to the ebb when we broke out the anchor. Then, while the rusty mudhook was lashed inboard, our jib alone was more than competent to hold the yacht against this slackening flood, until the mainsail went creaking up the mast, with that delectable sound of ropes that render through blocks. At once she gathered speed. The foam began to break from her bows, and the houses and masts of Burnham fell away, dwindling into the greyness of flat landscapes astern.

So firmly in mind nowadays has Burnham become associated with its yachts, that an open fairway there, yachtless and naked, would seem unnatural. Quaint old water-front though the town possesses, the dominant note is set by its yachts and yacht-slips, and the prevailing sense is modern.

Yet that quaint old water-front looked down, sleepily enough, upon quite a different anchorage once. Under the grey dawns of fifty years ago there were toil-scarred boats of the fishermen, and these only. Three hundred years before that, garb of ship and shipman were different, but Burnham was still a fisherman's haven. Tides that ebbed saw the fishers trawling seaward at dawn, and oars were heard that creaked through the evening twilights as the men came shoreward from their anchored doggers. A fisherman's livelihood was always precarious, but it was trebly so when—in time of the earlier Stuarts—pirates and foreign privateers would actually carry off their fishing-boats out of the very river. Grim Oliver, the great Protector, heard of these doings and sent Commonwealth ships, which, standing off and on, made Burnham fishery safe.

Above Burnham, and looking towards the low Essex uplands, the Crouch has a beauty of its own—up to Fambridge and beyond; but there is little to redeem its embanked ugliness in the seaward direction. Seaward the soil flattens out into levels of mere "alluvium." The stretches of marsh are flanked by sea-walls, grassed over and smooth; and the scanty trees have been stunted by

breath of the sea-salt. Under this dead grey sky it had a *triste* monotony.

Beyond the mouth of the Roach River to starboard, and behind its long line of sea-wall, Foulness Island protects its level pastures. Sole relief from the flatness of the sky-line, a group of trees, a few roofs and a tall church spire declared the position of Foulness; grey water and neutral sky and unending flats were all beside. As we surged forward with the full breeze, Holliwell Point and Foulness now gradually drew apart more and more; the broken water widened, the Shore Ends fell away, and we were at sea. A turbid immensity of dull grey water, wind-broken but not rough, spread unobstructed to the horizon: it was a treacherous surface, with its indiscriminate greyness that screened shoal and fairway alike. Through those shoals two narrow channels are the sole fairways. Unless the Whitaker Channel or the Raysand Channel be accurately followed on the ebb, the weather alone will determine the sequel.

The wind blew north-westerly. The West Buxey Buoy was as yet too small a point on the horizon for unaided eyes, and compass course was set accordingly, with allowance for drift of the tide. Then the tiny dark spot was suddenly located over the bowsprit; on we scudded, and the land, which had closed up across the Crouch entrance astern, regrouped itself into a flat coastline and dwindled away into the past. The ebb tide over entire breadth of the seascape was making the whole face of the water slide sideways to the north-east, whether through the

Whitaker Channel or across the Buxey Sand; in order, therefore, to compensate for shoalward drift, the yacht was put about and sailed right across to the edge of the Ray Sand. The counsel was one of exaggerated prudence, but prudent counsels have their own virtue when a March night, which looks like being a dirty companion, stands close at one's elbow.

"Cormorants as usual on the Buxey Beacon. Dull way of spending a life, but they seem to like it."

"They only go up there when they're too full of fish to fly about. Isn't a cormorant said to swallow its own weight of fish every day?"

The tall upright pole of the Beacon, standing lonely in the chill grey waste, was soon abeam. The wind had fallen lighter and there was again a suspicion of rain in the air. Disinclined on a lee-going tide to work (by the lead) through that little spitway west of the Knoll, we steered for the easterly tail of the shoal; we drank hot tea and let the yacht sag away eastward and seaward with the Blackwater ebb which she was now encountering. The wind was so uncertain that her efforts to turn to windward over the ebb were futile. She would have to stay at sea for the present.

"That black sky looks positively evil, and yet I shouldn't judge there's much vice in it."

The colour of the seascape at the moment was without merit or appeal. The sea was pallid, with just the least hint of a soiled ditchwater greenness, and packed cloud was above it. The cloud had turned dark like an approaching thunderstorm.

EBB-TIDE.

Then a bar of red burned smouldering through the deadness of it; the whole weird passage had really been an effect of sunset.

Away to westward of us lay the coast-line; St. Peter's-on-the-Wall, the ancient barn-like church on the site of Othona, could not be seen; forsaken and secluded always, the shore-line was to-night mysterious, smeared by the storm-light and obscure. The old Castrum there was a very lonely outpost of the Roman Empire.

Night was closing gradually in, and the dull bar of sunset had been blotted again in grey. Dusk was chilly. The lights from the buoys began to snap and flicker; and away to the northward the lamps of Clacton strung out like rows of yellow beads on the dark horizon. There were lighted rooms and soft

carpets and curtains and hot dinners where those lamps were standing sentinel; out on our own dark waters there was nothing but greyness and desolation. For twilight and night in March are apt to search to the bone.

Course was held eastward of the Eagle shoal, and shoreward. The strength of the sea-going ebb would be thus evaded. Darkness was now complete, and the windows of the cabin skylight were oblongs of gold on the dark cabin-top, for the lamp was alight below, and a clatter of pans told of cookery.

At turn of the tide the breeze freshened again, and blew firmly from the west. The dark water became living and busy, and little waves jumped up out of the dark and washed briskly away. In these days the N.W. Knoll Buoy was lighted, and there was still the red light on the Hospital Ship at Brightlingsea. Entrance to the Colne by night was a simple matter.

The one bugbear at the moment was the unlighted Bar Buoy. Course for the N.W. Knoll would carry us practically over it, and the night was black and the yacht travelling fast. Effective look-out was virtually impossible. One could "lay forrard," shivering with the cold and drenched in spray that she was already beginning to throw about her; one could scan the solid blackness to leeward under and beyond the bowsprit as it dipped and rose; one could often enough see buoys—buoys unknown to ordinary science—but they were none of them authentically on the sea. They lived in imagination

only. It was a useless strain on tired eyes, for nothing was distinguishable. Course was adjusted to give the buoy a berth, and "look-out" was completely abandoned; but at the same time it was a relief when the lighted buoy was reached, for a bump upon its unlighted friend would have been an ugly business.

The light from the N.W. Knoll Buoy lit up our sails in the dark above us as it flashed; we could see one another's faces. The yacht went about right beside it; then she swept away northward into the Colne—the wind free. At ten o'clock she was searching her way by the lead into the darkness of Brightlingsea Creek, the entrance of which is not easy to locate in complete darkness; in fact she just grazed the mud on the north side as she entered, but was not held up; and before eleven only darkness and dreams were with us in the cabin.

The Creek at low tide is the narrowest trickle of deep water. The anchorage is crowded, and its amenities are not promoted by the smacksmen's custom of riding to a single anchor and a long scope of chain. They house their own bowsprits, and so their sturdy little ships become invulnerable themselves; the men go ashore and the anchored black hulls sheer and yaw, sometimes to the terror of yachts—moor they never so wisely. The skill of the local men in threading in and out of the crowded Creek under sail is conspicuous, but even so they will sometimes bring up with a heavy thud against an anchored yacht. And—as a longshoreman once said to me—"They did ought to be keerful. If one

of them there smacks or berges give 'un a poke, it don't do nothin' no good." Without approving the syntax, I applaud the sentiment.

If the stranger who furls his sails in Brightlingsea Creek happens to cherish some idea that the town lying unexplored beyond the landing-causeway is an ancient place of wonder and dreams, it were perhaps best that, continuing to cherish the illusion, he should stay on board. Few towns are uglier. Nevertheless, Brightlingsea has its own halo, quite apart from its secure position as a yachting station and home of yacht-crews. The town was a non-corporate member of the Cinque Ports, being a "limb" of Sandwich; and the formal association between the two towns continues even now. It enjoyed all the privileges of the Cinque Ports, and continues to enjoy exemption from jury-service and service in the Militia. An unsympathetic Act of Parliament cancelled the latter boon in the case of Sandwich, but forgot the "limb," with the result that Brightlingsea still has its freedom and can jeer undutifully at its parent. The case is parallel to that of Berwick-on-Tweed, which was included in the declaration of war against Russia in 1853 but was omitted from the peace treaty. Poor Berwick was thus left with a burden of impotent belligerency for years uncounted.

Many a quiet night, when anchored in this Creek or out in the Colne estuary, one has watched the anchor-lights reflected like wandering gold threads in the dark water. Perhaps the wind is soughing in the darkness, and the water is alive as it splashes;

or perhaps the wind is light and the moonlight clear upon the haven. One can fancy the old ships that came to anchor here—the old carracks and cogs and caravels of our story-books, the old brightly-painted high-castled vessels that furled their emblazoned sails and let go their anchors. They were like the ships of fairy tales. And those sturdy anchors of theirs were not broken out by a donkey-engine, tut-tut-tutting invincibly, but by the crowd of lusty fellows that manned the capstan-bars, while the fiddler fiddled.

Henry VIII, in slashed hose and plumed cap, visited Harwich and the Colne, and spoke of them as "two notable havens." Of the two, he preferred the Colne, and used it for assembling his fleet against Scotland. Those tall ships of his, with their long streamers, their carved and gilded hulls and their painted shields, swung to the Colne tides, anchored in this fairway.

The reason for the Cinque Ports' exemption from jury and militia-service was that their townsmen were subject to the press-gang. So, in streets older than those dull streets of to-day, the press-gang recruited here with cutlass and bludgeon. Between the leaning gables, under the torchlight, the old noise was heard of oaths and shouts and of pattering feet that ran, the sounds of scuffle and the curse of the victim. Whether he would or no, the lad thrust on shipboard will smell powder and sail this wonderful world before his foot is set upon his native hard again.

In that dim past which is remote still, be the night

dimness never so sympathetic, strange wanderers have come to anchor here. Up near the old churchyard, ancient bones of giants have been unearthed; huge men of the North, it is thought, sea-robbers of Saxon times, they came raiding here and were worsted in the scuffle by the sturdy shore-folk. Other sinister shadows might also people the dusk. Wreckers, slinking out from Brightlingsea waters in the dark, have shown their wicked lanterns seaward; smugglers have stolen in through the mist on the young flood. Such history at least for its forebears and ancients is claimed by the township, though virtue now be in the ascendant.

But the possibilities of human depravity are not even now ignored, as one is reminded by seeing the police-boat. More than once, coming up quietly on the night tide, I have anchored in the Colne off Mersea Stone, and have perhaps not noticed that—out of the thickness of the night—a sail has taken shape.

"You'll lay snug there, sir. Good-night."

One looks up perhaps with half a start from furling the mainsail and fastening the tiers. The dark sail glimmers by and disappears. It is the police-boat which watches the oyster-grounds, and has come to take stock of the new arrival.

For—beyond all things else—the Colne is associated with the oyster-fishery. Although Brightlingsea sends its boats and men far away to the deep-sea fisheries, the smacks that ply in and out, dawn, dusk and noonday, are mostly busy with the oysters. The river and industry have been dominated by Colchester since the early Middle Ages. Colchester was the national market in old time; and long, long ago, Colne fishermen who sought to drive a bargain too extortionate found leisure to think on these things with their feet fast in the stocks. It is still written in Colchester archives.

. . . . . .

Among innumerable visits landward up the Colne, I have selected a little expedition which is one of precept and example for others rather than of credit for myself. It involves a change of my ship's company. On the occasion which I propose now to improve, I had entered the Colne, with only my

WIVENHOE —LOW TIDE

wife for shipmate, from the Wallet. The sea was breezy and blue. Up the Colne sailed the yacht at the time of the lengthening shadows, and she let go her anchor off Aldborough Point.

Next day it blew. We shifted our anchorage a little higher up. The afternoon was a flat calm with an evil sky.

Next morning the wind meant mischief. I had not moored, as I was expecting to get under way again; when, therefore, I was requested to man the dinghy for Wivenhoe, I ought to have claimed respite sufficient to lay out the kedge. Time, however, was thought to press; I omitted the rite, and the full price was exacted, as the sequel will show.

But the sequel was not yet. For the present I was employing every muscle of my shoulders and back to pull the dinghy against the force of a rising gale and a spiteful miniature seaway. Wivenhoe (which still remembers with a species of pride that it was shaken by the earthquake of 1884) was passed, and Rowhedge was reached. I rested, and recovered breath. We looked across at the ships on the stocks opposite and exchanged greetings with the waterside loafers.

"Didn't think you was goin' to git here; that blows," said one. They had been watching us since we passed Wivenhoe.

The bows of a ferry-boat grated on the hard, and the people landed. The old ferryman shoved the boat off again with his long sweep.

"That blows," he said, as he settled to his oars again.

We also proceeded. The chief desideratum had been to forsake the yacht, as being too lively to-day for comfortable occupation. The secondary motive was a desire to revisit Colchester Hythe.

"Wadyer want fur to go theer?" a smacksman had remonstrated years ago, "it's naught but a dirty set o' quays with them ole sprit-s'l berges." It is little more, indeed, but the quays are the quays of Colchester. And Colchester is a place of romance and memories.

In the days gone by I have intimately explored these upper waters in small boats. Up beyond the Hythe to East Bridge my little ship has gone. Up the Roman River to Fingringhoe she has found her way. And the miller came out with flour all over his face, and opened his mouth and said "Wot." "Wot," said he, "where hev yew sprung from? Why, we ain't seen a boat up here, not these five years."

"Roman River" that tributary of the Colne is suggestively called, but it is older than the Romans. The tongue of land between the two rivers was part of the ancient British *oppidum*, and the rivers were its natural defences. The Britons used to "fortify the intricate woods," they made entrenchments and ramparts; there they herded their cattle, there they lived and moved, and the whole inhabited district —walled in by woods and morasses—was euphemistically called a "town." Before just such a place, one Julius Cæsar inconveniently appeared, and he helped himself to "many men and much cattle." The woaded prisoners in chains would grace a Triumph

in Rome, dusty white and unhappy at tail of the conquering chariot.

The whole district is a treasure-house of memories, but the past was remote to-day in face of these chattering cranes, and those engines that clanked into Hythe station and out of it. The tide was, moreover, now falling with a rapidity that must not be ignored; we therefore set sail in the dinghy, hoisting a few square inches of sail, which set us spinning swiftly through the turbid grey water between grey banks of smooth mud now emerging. The yacht would lie snugly enough at low water, provided that she had not "dragged"; I had anchored with scrupulous care as to position, with an eye to lee as well as to weather. I ought to have waited to moor her before starting, but I hoped that all would be well. Wivenhoe was passed; the tide was more than half-way down now and the wind was a moderate gale. She would soon be in sight; where was she?

Alack, the poor yacht! There she lay, tide-forsaken and aloft, right at high-water mark. My companion had never beheld the like before, and her eyes grew round with consternation as she scanned the whole body of the hull unwontedly disclosed.

"What's going to happen?" she speculated, for that stranded thing up there was, after all, her bedroom, and it had gone away—inaccessibly over the ooze. "You don't seem to worry," she added half-reproachfully, as we scudded on, almost abreast of the truant now.

"It's only tiresome; it's just a night's rest gone," I grumbled wearily, "but I'll fix you up all right; we'll go and see."

The yacht, as I said, was inaccessible over the soft mud, but we landed at a hard lower down, and approached her from the shore. Two longshoremen of course lounged aloof, expectant and covertly pleased. They brightened at sight of our returning expedition; they thought that their money was certain.

I looked at the position of the yacht and they stood by and helped me look. They feasted their eyes on her, now without compunction or disguise. They shook their heads.

"Nasty position she lay in," they said. "Doubt you won't fare to get her off."

"On the contrary," I replied, "she is exactly

where I intended she should be, if she had the bad luck to drag." Of set purpose I made my tone as steadily oracular as I could contrive it. "Up there" (I pointed) "are piles; down there" (I indicated with a single finger) "is a hard shore; *here* she has a beautiful mud berth. Nothing could be better."

They evidently felt that this was not a promising opening. They set their feet apart awhile, and waited; then they shifted their ground of attack.

"Tides be funny things here. Wonnerful big tide it wer to-day, wa'n't it, Bill? Won't be not half that to-morrow. Tell you for why. Tides are takin' off."

I maintained the bold front, but they had touched an uneasy chord this time. "Begging your pardon," I said, "the tides are increasing for three days yet by the almanack." But my heart misgave me all the same. There had been so strong a touch of north in the wind that this tide might easily prove the biggest of the spring-tide period.

"You won't get her off," was the decisive answer, "not fleet this tide. 'Tain't no do."

They shook their heads again. Then, after a pensive interval for spitting, they came to the point.

"Now *we* could come down tide-time, and lend a hand. Same 's us, we know this place."

My answer was level-voiced. "One o'clock to-night she'll be floating in the fairway," I said, and left them. I had other things to attend to.

If the wind at night were as dirty as this, I should not be able to lay out the big anchor from the dinghy. So, after seeing my wife on board, I dressed for the

part and dropped down into the mud. The men watched me with cat-like intentness.

"On'y that li'l bit o' cable. Drag? Rum 'un if she hadn't done," said my critics, now openly hostile.

I made no reply, but dragging my feet heavily through the morass, I made over to the anchor. I unwound the fouled cable, held it up to show its scope, and chucked it contemptuously into the mud. I returned and hauled up chain from the hold until I had fifty fathoms in all. At this practical turn of events, the longshoremen turned their backs and tramped off in disgust.

Solitary, in the fading light, I paid that chain through, staggered under its weight, knee-deep in mud, as I laid it in the desired direction, dragged it in stages into a heap, which sank and almost disappeared in mud, then further down into another heap, and continually working the anchor channel-ward. Sliding in mud, I fell a dozen times with the weight of that anchor if I fell once. I panted and sweated. I envied the light and comfort that the gleam from the cabin high up on the bank betokened. Was it worth it? I felt the loneliness and the eeriness of this sea of ooze in which I was plashing in the stormy night. I was plastered from head to foot in mud. I sank deeper and deeper, and could hardly drag my tired legs out. But at last I reached the water. Right in I went and drove the fluke of the anchor deep into the ground. I then returned, washed out my clothes in a pool of salt water on the bank, donned others, and crept into the cabin to lie down and await the tide. The winch was all ready.

Again I was out as sentinel on the dark bank, hearing the long sough of the wind through the forsaken midnight. I had been afraid of falling asleep in the drowsy cabin, and so condemned myself to vigil and wind-swept darkness outside.

I looked out over the dark landscape, and half-forgotten associations lived again. History is usually a magician, but it has played traitor to one cherished illusion. Formerly I had really believed that Geoffrey of Monmouth spoke of fact when he declared that St. Helena was daughter of Coel. From earliest days I can recall my strong impression of Veronese's picture of St. Helena's Vision of the True Cross, a picture which—though sober in colour—is somehow, in its very drawing, sumptuously Venetian. In thought I had claimed the delicate Italian atmosphere of Veronese as belonging in reality to these dark levels of Essex. But Geoffrey stands contradicted. Nevertheless the existence of Coel as an historic personage of these parts is not denied. Old King Cole we call him now, but whether he were merry or not beyond the ordinary is unrecorded; probably enough (poor old man) he found too many Romans about for his perfect merriment, he being a native.

St. Helena, so far as Essex is concerned, is a myth. One need, however, make no appeal to mere legend, for history (dim though it be) has its own figures and can people the darkness. Shakespeare's Cymbeline was once a living King in this green countryside; and he, though a Briton, was no barbarian. The British King, lonely and aloof

among his shaggy peasantry, had Roman ideas of refinement, and his Court at Colchester was the Court of a King.

Often the yacht has anchored in these dark reaches. And sometimes, in the starlit calm, one has almost *felt*—with an intimacy born of the darkness—that tide of time which, with never a ripple, has over-smoothed everything, has expunged history and race and custom with the same silent sureness as the tide from the dark sea outside will here invade the long grey tidal slopes at midnight. Here indeed is no evil and haunted shore, and not here

> "The fisher on his watery way,
> Wandering at close of day,
> Will spread his sail and seize his oar
> Till he pass the gloomy shore,
> Lest the dead should from their sleep,
> Bursting o'er the starlit deep,
> Lead a rapid masque of death." . . .

Sorrowful dead innumerable there must be, but it is rather the splendour and pageantry of the past which are recalled. The train of elephants of the Emperor Claudius, which added further pomp and terror to the might of his legionaries and chariots, moved down on Colchester, and past Colchester came Boadicea in later years. "Of great height, piercing glance and harsh voice, and with thick yellow hair falling below her waist," says the Roman historian, "she stood in her chariot, holding a spear," and addressed her warriors. The Britons were in revolt. They swept over the Roman garrisons, slaughtering, burning, gibbeting, in an orgy of

revenge and hatred. Battle was joined in these Essex fields of ours. Suetonius with his legions in wedge formation and under iron discipline broke the fierce-eyed rabble, and followed up victory with grim downright slaughter—not of men only, but of women and the very beasts of burden. The place was a shambles, running blood; these human creatures—things like ourselves—were swept out of existence by the thousand.

The Saxon and Dane who followed, towering strangers with light in their eyes from the sea, are now as merest shadows beside the solid mailed figure of Eudo Dapifer, Norman Lord of Colchester.

Great man he was, who tempered his iron firmness with such kindness as to win the gratitude of his subject population. He was the builder of Colchester Castle, the keep of which is by far the largest Norman keep remaining in England; it was no doubt designed by the same architect as designed the Tower of London, which it closely resembled. Bishop Gundulf drew out the plans, and Eudo no doubt battered down most of the Roman walls and buildings thereabout, in order to help himself to materials for building.

The tide was now rising: between the blackness of the banks the broad ribbon of dingy grey had broadened into a long lake, and the noise of waves lapping and washing on the margin was blurred now and now distinct through the sweep of the night-wind. The tide which had left Colchester isolated from the sea and stranded upon a margin of tidal mud was swelling up between the saltings and under the bridges and linking up the sleeping city again with that dark sea outside.

Solidly black in the night, the walled city compact, under its towering Norman keep, has slept beneath the stars a hundred thousand nights like this, through its long and pictured Past. Too much history is tiresome, but Colchester is so full of it that one can hardly disentangle one's self and evade its memories. They beckon, they invite. All the life of a mediæval town has hummed within its walls; the market has teemed with colour and life for centuries, the Fairs have brought in the bright faces and chattering tongues of the countryside. Out from its Jewry, the

Jew slunk with the yellow badge of his Jewdom on his Jewish gaberdine; the lean witch was put in the pillory, and wastrels were whipped at the cart's tail. There were the cage, the ducking-stool, the gibbet, the stake.

The tide was now up, and its dark waves were slopping over the saltings, and were bobbing and bickering round the stranded hull. The wind was less, and there was one starlit rift in the dead curtain of cloud.

As the cable began to clank over the winch, a head appeared from the cabin.

"Where's the bank?" it said. "Why, *we're floating*." And her eyes sought to penetrate the black darkness about us.

With the cable reduced to a few fathoms, and a riding-light hung on the forestay, the yacht swung at top of the tide, and her bows were soon parting the swift current of the ebb.

I was out at first light with the mop and bucket, swilling and mopping everywhere to get rid of the mud. She rode to her anchor in the channel. My two longshoremen were also down early on the shore, but when I looked in their direction, they remembered that they had other business; they turned their backs and loitered moodily away.

XIII

WALTON BACKWATERS

"THAT alarm clock is the chap I really bar," he grumbled, invisible in the darkness, as I rowed him out in the dinghy to the yacht. It was a very thick night.

"Turning in at midnight and setting the alarm for 3.15 is, you think——"

"Cruelty to animals," he yawned. "Shall I chuck the traps on board?"

We were alongside. The bags were dumped on the dark deck and stowed; and in a few minutes the yacht was as dark and as quiet as when we had boarded her. Only now a dinghy streamed out astern of her on the rising tide.

In the dark cabin that unmerciful alarm clock went off in a hurricane of sound, before daylight; and, within ten minutes of our first awakening yawn, we were under way. According to the book of the words it ought just to be high water now. Heybridge Basin and Mill Beach, asleep in the darkness, were unseen as we slid away with a light draught of westerly wind over the grey face of the water.

"No rain, and that's one blessing." It really was the best that we could say for the morning. The

glass was falling, and the sky—as the reluctant light came greyly and slowly—was packed with cloud. Osea Island was already astern, as the yacht slipped seaward with the tide. So dawn broadened into cloudy day.

There was a flatness of effect: the whole grey world was in one plane—without one note of colour that quickened or relieved. All was in a low key, a monotone.

As the estuary opened, the breeze fell lighter; the shores dropped gradually away, they were effaced in the greyness of the morning, and she held on by compass, rounding the Bar Buoy, and moving quietly on towards Clacton. Our own course was laid, with due respect, between the Bar and Eagle shoals; but a yacht which had sailed out of Mersea just ahead had treated the shoalwater with greater impartiality: she had genially shaped course right across the tail of the Eagle. The result was that she suddenly ceased to maintain her lead; frenzied activities in her dinghy had been succeeded by apathy and gloom; and, before she had faded away over the grey sea astern, she was already beginning to list over. The tide was still on the ebb.

Before Clacton Pier had been passed, however, the tidal current was returning from the North Sea for the relief of stranded mariners and for the undoing of others—of those, in fact, bound coastwise like ourselves against it. Unless the wind stiffened we should merely inherit an "equilibration of forces." With the tide bound for Mersea and the wind breathing indifferently the other way, we should

continue to hang poised between the two of them, and to spend our morning watching Clacton from the sea. The time was nearly ten o'clock. All that remained was to whistle; the yacht hung hovering on the grey sea.

"West-sou'-west," said I, feeling a welcome air, "and a little more body in it. Come, that's better."

She was really beginning to push through the contrary tide; the cliffs of the coast-line were sliding comfortably by; at noon she had passed Walton and the Naze Tower, and was laying course for Dovercourt. By keeping the tall chimney at Harwich between the two Dovercourt lighthouses, the Pye End Buoy—at present invisible—would soon materialize, tiny as a black point of a pin.

Walton, the town, is really only the heir of an earlier Walton. The old town is under the sea, and it is even said that the West Rocks, four miles seaward of the Naze, are the ancient site of Walton. That is as it may be. The changes, though sure, have not been rapid within the past two hundred and fifty years, for the old charts show the coast much as it is now, and "Woulton" church is on the present site. All the same the sea was very busy eating up this coast until the effect of transverse groynes was discovered, things which keep the great waters usefully employed in silting up sand upon the shore instead of making meals off it. Possibly in this manner the predatory instinct of the sea has been really curbed. In 1838 Sir Charles Lyell, after examining the coast from Harwich southwards, said that Harwich would, at no remote period, become

an island. To a geologist a mere century is an insignificant period, and I doubt, therefore, whether I shall live to see the fulfilment of his prophecy; but—if and when the thing occurs—I hope that the local inhabitants will not dishonestly throw up a road embankment between the new island and the shore (as the Romans did at Mersea), because it would be a change to sail through behind the island, and to see Harwich from the back.

But these speculations relate to the coast further northward. Whether or not Walton is permanently safe must remain to be seen. The groynes or breakwaters have been a great success. In 1878, the

Builder said that it had been observed that since the erection of the breakwaters there had been "a constant influx of clean sand, which has made the small hamlet extend into a considerable seaside resort." The appreciation of the groynes is in effect the same as my own more informal testimony above.

If the sea, like an invading army, has really been bending the Walton front back all the way from the West Rocks, then the army of the Naze has only escaped complete envelopment by the very narrowest of margins. The flat land between Walton Channel and the sea is merely a few hundred yards wide; and the sea has missed the opportunity of a lifetime. It had only to take breath for one final rush. After pushing the surf-line shorewards mile after mile, it required only one crowning onslaught of three or four hundred yards some dark night, and its waves would have found themselves pouring into Sole Creek and Walton Channel and Hamford Water, and flooding all round the cliff-land of the Naze.

The process would be exactly similar to that of the incoming surf-water on the beach when it swirls and boils through the children's sand-canals and washes round the keep of the sand-castle. In recollection one can see it still, as in the days of one's wooden spade; the swirling water licks round the sand and flattens the faces of the walls to a perfect smoothness from which all the spade marks have been effaced. The castle stands alone—an island.

Were that process about to take place on the heroic scale here at Walton, it would be policy to keep out

of the way while the act was developing. One remembers, from sand-castle days, that small boats which make an early passage on first irruption of the sea are apt to make the passage bottom upward.

If, however, in the inscrutable decrees of Providence, the sea had not been checked for the sake of a hundred yards or two, but had been allowed to link up with Walton "backwaters," the new channel would have saved us some good sea-miles to-day. As the yacht sailed past Walton, the chimney of the foundry was about half a mile distant as the crow flies, and about ten miles distant by water. For not only has the yacht to sail round the honest cliff-land of the Naze, but she must also avoid its "outlier," the Pye Sand that lurks hidden, unseen and treacherous. She must sail nearly to Harwich before she can face home for Walton.

The Pye Sand is not a place to be desired. Much of it uncovers at low water, especially at springs; it is hard yellow sand with large hummocks and hollows, and each hollow is a great pond of salt water. Many of the sand surfaces are fretted and ribbed by the tide. The stretch of sand is a lonely place, with the thread of horizon sea round it, and the waves breaking along its edges. A bevy of gulls will gather at its seaward end, standing, or drifting round in short circular curves of flight, and a few duck from the marshes will be seen in the shoreward direction. Nothing else is stirring under the grey sky except the wind. The sea and its ships are quite remote.

That is what it looks like when laid bare by the

tide and approached from the shore; it is quite other when covered by the tide and mistakenly approached from the sea.

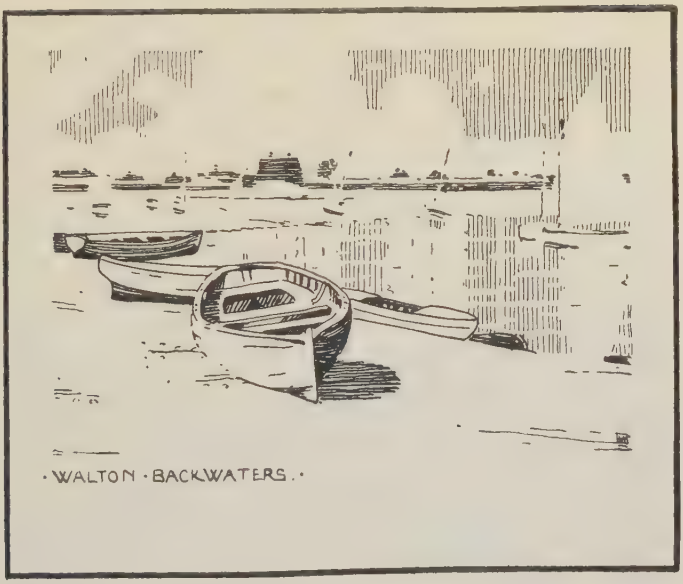
"She wur a good boat, she wur," said the old boatman, speaking of a yacht that I had known well a dozen years ago, "but the gen'leman he didn't make no count for the Pye S'n Buoy. He come in over the shoal, and the wind wur easterly."

He paused, sucking his pipe, as he looked down the Creek, the eyes of him bright in his weather-beaten face.

"I disremember what year it wur, happen ten year come Michaelmas. Sea, it fit that there up proper. I watch her a-dollopin' on. She bomped, and she bomped on the sand, cruel, *she* did; her iron ballast come right through her hull, and she mos' broke up into drift-wood. Us chaps tried to come by that ballast. 'Tweren't no do; it sunk away in the sand, most of it did. Lost."

The yachtsmen themselves were lucky to escape with their lives, and the moral is obvious—steer round the Pye End Buoy and give the shoal a berth. For that reason we were now entering the regular channel at the Pye End; although the tide was well up, we had attempted no short-cuts over the shoal. Save in special cases, the plan of laying courses for a ship at least double one's own draught has much to commend it.

Under grey sky we hauled our wind and began to beat up the narrow channel. The tide seemed lethargic and unhelpful, when wanted; and the wind was light. Should we save our tide up to



·WALTON·BACKWATERS·

Walton? It would be so much snugger to lie anchored for the night in the quiet creek, than rolling out here. One must whistle and again whistle. We were beating gradually onwards, but the turn of the tide was getting perilously near.

"Did you ever see such a weird effect? Look at the water."

Under a clouded sky of a strange buff colour, the sea had taken on some delicate tint of palest green. It was a perfect harmony, a delicate colour scheme; and yet somehow abnormal, uncanny. Ought we to shorten canvas?

It foretold only a passing squall. The wind came,

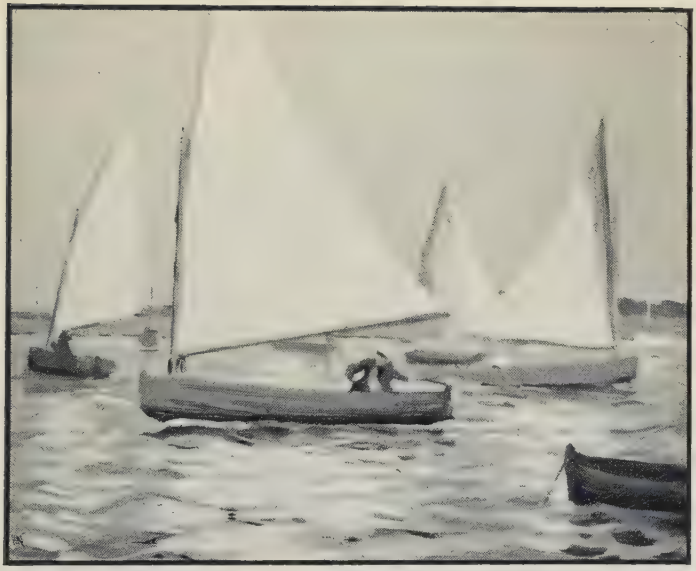
came with a smoking smother of rain that rattled on the water. The yacht lay over and threaded to and fro across the channel with a broken white wake astern, and a buoy would now and again be seen, but everything else had been blotted and expunged in the rain-squall. Then the rain ceased to pepper on the water, the landfalls again came into being and the squall was past. But now we had saved our tide.

The edge of the sand, under the water, must be like the wall of a house, so steeply does it break into the channel. From a spot where the flat surface dries out, it drops sheer down to a depth of forty feet.

The squall had saved us; we were soon in Hamford Water ("Handfordwater" of the old charts), and had turned up the narrow channel on the port hand to Walton. The anchor was let go just a dozen hours after we had left Heybridge Basin. A slow passage.

Here—at their moorings in Walton Channel and Twissel Creek—lay the white yachts, and here or there a dinghy was away up to the Town Hard. The pleasant life of a frequented creek was about one, with the dinghies moving to and fro and the distant voices. At the creek-head lay the houses of Walton and the square church tower.

Hamford Water is a curious place, with its archipelago of islands and intricate tangle of creeks and tidal streams. The name of the biggest island (Horsey) is of Danish origin, and the harbour was well suited to Danish ends, when the marauders



DINGHY RACING AT WALTON—AWAITING THE GUN

haunted the fringes of land, and wrung Danegeld from the Saxons. The name of Walton itself has Saxon associations. It used to be Walton-le-Soken. Kirby-le-Soken and Thorpe-le-Soken have been wise enough to retain their ancient names; but Walton has foregone that dignified suffix which meant that it had the right to a judiciary and even a legislature of its own.

It was on some other day that we paid a visit to Landermere. The yacht herself does not sail further than a point in the main channel of Hamford Water just beyond Kirby Creek. Then the little mast is stepped in the dinghy, and away she sails.

At high water the effects up there are indistinguishable from those of the Broads. The sheltered water lies blue between banks of sunlit green. But some care is needed in sailing, even a dinghy, up to Landermere Quay, for the channel is very narrow, and the mudbanks which the tide has covered are wide.

The withies that mark the channels get broken by the barges that come up here into the heart of the fields, and they are often not replaced.

"There was an old chap up here," they told me at one place, "and he didn't hold with seein' the brooms planted 'cept where he thought was jes' so. *Pull* 'em out, he would. 'They didn't ought to set 'em up if so be they can't set 'em right,' so *he* thought, 'and no marks is better than wrong 'uns,' that's wot *he* said."

One rarely finds the withies put in "jes' so," but most of us prefer approximate marks to no marks at

all. Therefore that ancient worthy, if discovered in the fact, ought to be rapped soundly over the knuckles, and roundly told to leave the marks alone.

"Them barges pull 'em over too. What do they care? Gone to-morrow."

Talking of barges, I am reminded of the casual way in which bargemasters of the old school will find their way about. The creeks and inlets of the sea run miles inland, and farms have their own "wharves" at remote spots accessible only at top of the tide. Take, for instance, Landermere and Beaumont Quays up here. The old bargemaster works by traditional instinct and knowledge rather than by chart; and when he hears—perhaps at Faversham—that he is to take cargo to Beaumont Quay, he replies:

"Never heerd tell o' the place."

"Well, y'know Harwich, doncher?"

"Dessay I do; ain't bin there more'n a few hundred times."

"You git up that way then, and turn along 's if you was goin' to Walton; then you'll find out. See?"

He "finds out" by calling out "Hi, mate," to someone on another barge or a smack. It is like asking the way in a strange town. "Take the first to the right, and the second to the left, follow the tram-lines and then ask again." In the creeks, of course, they often get pilotage, and probably would do so here; but the plan of campaign set out above is long-established and well-known.

The dinghy sailed up to Landermere Quay and

we went ashore. A cart was just disappearing round the corner, past the one row of cottages, as we walked up.

A wizened fellow in hodden grey accosted us.

"You won't get nothin' here," he chuckled, with grinning hostility; "ain't no shop."

We had wanted a loaf, but it really did not matter.

"Was that the baker's cart just gone off?"

"Yuss." The monosyllable afforded him relish.

"No shop at all?" I inquired.

We had a good margin of stores on the yacht; time was also on our hands, and the old man was evidently a character.

"No shop," he said, and his grin faded into sudden seriousness. "Shop *was*" (and the gnarled hand indicated an empty cottage) "here."

Then a glimmering of recollection dawned, and I saw light.

"It used to be the King's Head, usen't it?"

"Yuss, it wuz." He ground his heel deeply into the road and turned and spat.

"Wouldn't pay?" I hazarded.

"Landlord wuz a fule," he grimly confided; "he sarced (sauced) the p'lice, and they took his licence."

"Then you're teetotallers here, gone dry by force? How far must you go for a drink?"

"Not us, we ain't," he rapped with doddering ferocity. "Three miles it is to Thorpe-le-Soken, but when us want a glass o' beer, us go theer, and . . . *git it.*"

This avowal of the faith that was in him softened the edge of his ill-temper. "Want bread?" he

·LOADING·HAY··

humanly inquired; "p'raps the neighbours . . ." But we could really do without, and we thanked him and strolled away with mutual goodwill.

That same evening, when the yacht was lying to her anchor in the lonely channel, we again took the dinghy, and at low water explored these creeks. Night was closing in, and the wind had gone. There was a desolate loneliness in the narrow waterways between the steep tidal banks that was quite weird, a strangeness in the damp twilight. Night had fallen, and the yacht's riding-light was brightly reflected in the water as we returned on board. Hamford Water was deserted, not a mast, not a sail, not a riding-light. We were completely alone.

To me the witchery of

these tidal creeks and backwaters is never greater than in their night-loneliness. The ebb tide swims past in the darkness and swirls away to sea, and there is no other sound except the scatter of the wind, and the strange cries of the night-birds. I have lounged on the dark deck for hours, intent upon the silence.

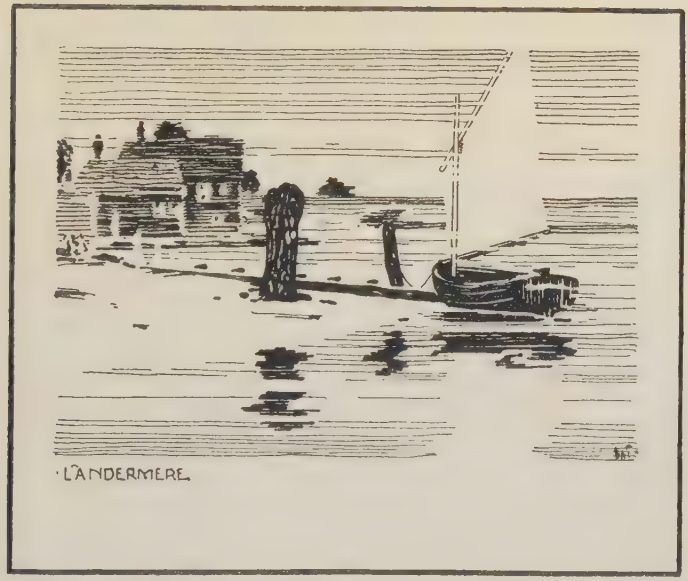
Out of these dark sea-borders, under the night sky, one's attitude towards the Stone Age ceases to be patronizing. Smug in our modern civilization, with the whole world and the world's ages as our servants, we find everything provided for us, and we originate nothing. As a matter of course we pity the poor savages. But that prehistoric man of 4000 years ago, whose skeleton was discovered near Walton a few years since, had greater calls upon his ingenuity and manhood than many of us are likely to encounter. Pampered with other people's ideas, living on the wits of the dead, we have little to our personal credit. But that stone-man, neighboured by intrusive creatures (the bones of their like have been discovered here, monsters now extinct), the stone-man had himself alone to depend upon. The craft with which he forged his weapons was probably small as compared with his craft in using them, and in saving his own skin. The world had not then submerged the individual.

As an anchorage sheltered from all winds, and comfortable in the worst weather, few places along the coast can rival Walton Channel. One day I had left the Orwell with a westerly wind and a falling glass, on the tail of the ebb, expecting to be at Walton

in an hour and a half or so. It actually took four and a half hours. The wind spun round ahead, and I could not escape past Landguard before the sluicing flood of the fullest spring-tide came swirling in against me. Beating over the lee-going tide was slow work, but—as the wind increased—I gradually managed to wriggle out. Meanwhile the wind was lashing itself into a fury, the glass was falling perpendicularly, and the rain was tearing across in horizontal lines. Happy to be in landlocked water (and with reason), I plugged on, and the gale had not yet become a full gale when I picked up a mooring-buoy in Walton Channel, and contentedly made fast. Let it blow. Even if the mooring-chain broke, we should only ground on soft mud; we should be as safe and snug as in an armchair at home.

And so we were. I recall that night of noise and fury with strange pleasure; in a sudden gale like that, one might so easily have been caught at sea, and here I was in the snuggest creek on the coast; at Pin Mill anchors were dragging and yachts fouling, a yacht moored off Harwich broke her mooring and was picked up next day off the Shipwash—ten miles out to sea—by a Lowestoft trawler. In the Swin, a barge was dragging her anchors, and setting on to the sands, and the life-boat was away to her aid. And here were we, in perfect shelter.

The fury of swept rain ceased, but not the wind; and I sat in the cockpit, watching the savagery of the wind's searing touch as it furrowed and tore the surface of that tormented water, rough even in this



creek. At sunset time the wind whirled the clouds away for a moment, tossed them aside with the suddenness with which one might flick a curtain from a window, and a fire of sunset was disclosed for a few seconds; then the dark clouds, flying columns of dirty grey, again smothered it. Later, they broke again at moments in their headlong scurry over the sky, and—single above the calm afterglow—was one bright star, amazingly steadfast and peaceful by contrast with that windy wrack that weltered over it.

Then came night, and later the moonrise, with clouds still careering like demented express trains across the moon's serenity of luminous silver. The

clouds came and went so prodigiously fast that one wondered where they all came from. The supply seemed inexhaustible.

I simply sat and watched it all for a great part of the night. We were wind-rode. The waves rushing past created the illusion that the ship was under way and travelling fast. There were flying gleams of moonlight reflected in the wind-creased waves. In a lull of the wind, the stern of the yacht would sometimes try to work round a little to windward in obedience to the tide, and a fierce gust would *smack* it back, to stream out straight again along the line of the wind. Seen between the jerking shrouds and rocking mast, to the tune of this yelling riot of wind, the very landscape had a weirdness of its own. The whole thing seemed to be a preposterous and noisy dream, wind and water and darkness and moonlight and all. It was two hours after midnight before I could summon resolution to tear myself away from the living pageant and turn in.

That was the night. Next morning the sunlight was as searching as the wind itself; out of a blue heaven, full of roaring wind, the sunlight snapped at and bit every object in the landscape. But the wind was ceasing to be a gale; it was fast becoming a lusty wind, merely hilarious and welcome. The glittering earth was alive with it. The dinghy was carefully navigated shoreward, paying close heed to these miniature "seas" which—even here—were still breaking.

The local life-boat had thrashed away seaward to succour that barge in distress off the Middle Sand

in the Swin. Caught at anchor by the gale, and low in the water with her cargo of coal, the barge had been dragging towards the Sand. If she touched the shoal she would probably break up. The official record shows that it was "during a whole S.W. by W. gale with a very rough sea that the crew of five was rescued by the life-boat." As the wind mitigated, the barge was got clear and assisted by the life-boat into Harwich. We watched her go by.

Then, on board the yacht that selfsame evening, we were able to watch the sun go down upon a reasonable and orderly world, and leave a quiet summer gloaming and night. It was a magical access of peace. The riot and fury that had run themselves to exhaustion lent but the greater tone, the greater depth to this repose of the afterglow.

Summer breezes sailed the dinghy, time and again, over the blue creeks and inlets of Hamford Water. The wandering channels are quite landlocked. Round Horsey Island at high tide, with blue salt-water brimming right up to the tufted grasses of the banks, the little white sail would carry her; or upon the steep sandy shore of Stone Point she would bring up, and hours might be spent in the solitude of the sandhills with their silver-green grasses. Away to the northward the Pye Sand stretches, uncovered at low water and seabird-haunted; then, when the tide is high, all the creeks and inlets are flooded and blue. Islanding Stone Point itself, a channel (through which the tide gurgles in a hurry) leads from the Walton channel out to the wide North Sea.

The opening of this little creek on the seaward

side is an Orford Haven in miniature. All along the straight line of shore the waves break in long lines of foam. They break across the entrance of the desired haven, and anyone who is young enough to amuse himself by entering the haven in his dinghy will find that—if he can hit his channel accurately—his little ship will run merrily through the breaking of the shoreward waves, and will be suddenly translated from the heave and scurry of the summer seaway into the quiet water of the creek. It is quite exciting. If, of course, the dinghy-pilot misses his channel and finds the beach, his ship broaches to, and he has the pleasure of getting extremely wet, as each wave breaks right into his stranded dinghy.

And all the time the sunshine is bright upon the sandhills and their silver-green grasses, and upon the long creek that leads up to Walton.

XIV

HARWICH AND THE STOUR

CLOSE-HAULED to a dirty south-west wind, the yacht went about off the Cork Lightship. She had been beating coastwise, turning dead to windward, with two reefs down, and the wind was cantankerous and hostile.

Whish, *whoo-oosh*, *whoo-oosh*, *bump*, *whish*, *whoo-oosh* and so on. This, repeated *ad nauseam* for the whole afternoon, had been the noise of the water under her. The *bump* was the bring-up as each wave hit her. And the whole refrain was not repeated in a whisper. It was noise, real noise. The boom flogged, and the blocks went mad, and the jib *chucked* at its sheet and slatted in a frenzy of silly excitement every time she went about. The very noise was wearisome.

Sou'-westered and oilskinned and buttoned up to the eyes, we were both wetly ornamental. The yacht was always rather inclined to throw the spray about when on a wind; and to-day she had surpassed herself. Every wave contributed its cutting smother of driven scud; we ducked to it as it came, we dripped with it, our oilies shone with it; we spat it out, we blinked it out of our eyes. And

still it flew. The whole thing was exhilarating enough in its way, thrashing to windward through this dirty seaway under a leaden sky, but all the same a landlocked anchorage would have its points. We should soon be inside Landguard Point and out of the wet.

In the meantime a smoking rain-squall whipped across us, smothering the whole visible world in a cloud of driven rain; it slashed and ripped the water as if owing it a grudge. Heavy as it was, however, it hit us less solidly than the salt-water fusillade; and the salt-water scud never slackened, whereas the rain soon tailed off into a modified and discontented spattering, and then ceased. The salt-water spray carried on; whether consciously aimed at my face or not, it scored a hit every time.

To that, however, I have not the smallest objection; one's face gets tough. The real provocation is when (as may happen with the best-regulated oilskins) a trickle gets through at the neck and descends southward. A careless movement of the head may give it its chance, and down goes the trickle. Like an icy finger, on the intimate warmth of throat and chest and midriff it registers its wanderings. Cold out of all reason, considering its physical dimensions, one little drop makes the whole body to shudder. U-ugh!

The Platters and Andrews Buoys, tumbling about in tumult of the seaway, were dropped astern. The Andrews Shoal never has less than four feet of water at low tide nowadays, but the sand used to dry out completely in the eighteenth century. Wet or

dry, it was soon to leeward of us, and we were weathering Landguard Point. We had reached the ancient and famous anchorage comfortably known as the Rolling Ground—a blessed title (one can fancy) in the ears of sea-sick passengers on sailing packets of old time. No doubt the name was handsomely earned when the tide from Orwell Haven kept a ship broadside-on to the swell which came with a north-east wind from the North Sea. Even Anson's great three-deckers, when they brought the intended queen over in 1761, would be conscious of it if a real north-easter caught them in the roadstead. One can fancy his fleet,

with their towering black hulls painted in white streaks the height of the gun-ports, clewing up to the call of the boatswain's pipe—each ship a hive of industry—and letting go their anchors as they rounded to the tide. For here the yacht was entering the chief seaport of Essex—a distinction which Harwich has held since the thirteenth century, when it definitely deposed Maldon.

Tide-forsaken at low water, Maldon was inevitably ousted from pre-eminence once the size of ships increased. And even for small shipping the waters of the Blackwater are less snug in prevailing westerly winds than this landlocked water inside the haven off Harwich, at common estuary of the Stour and Orwell. In close shelter of the land, yet immediately neighbouring the open sea, Orwell Haven was a gift of nature. As a place for assembling fleets it was patently good, and the pageants of mediæval war-array were time and again witnessed by these same waters, where the tides swirl busily in and out, imperturbably the same. The flow and ebb that now assist our casual wandering, inbound for Harwich, were accustomed to carry the old fleets seaward and home when King Edward III set sail for Sluys or Monk's shot-battered fleet victoriously put in, after fighting the Dutch.

Much water has flowed under the bridges and many sea-tides have chafed and bubbled round Landguard Point since that first great naval victory at Sluys, off Flanders shore. The fleet of King Edward III that left Orwell Haven was primitive enough. Peaceful ships in those days could at once

BARGES ENTERING HARWICH

be converted into men-of-war by merely calling in the professional castle-wright, and he would hammer together the platform on scaffolding that decorated each end of the ships. Away they went, royal banners and all. The high fighting-platforms were crowded with armoured men; the grappling-irons were ready, and grim engines were shipped below for hurling stones. The long galleys too, with their heavy oars lifting and splashing, went snakily seaward, like lean animals bent on prey.

The yacht had now fairly opened the haven, and the helm went up and the mainsheet was eased away, slipping greedily through the blocks. Landguard Point began to stretch seaward of us. Bell Buoy, tumbling with the broken sea, rang and clanged and rang again, and we were swept past it. The green waves lifted the buoy, and toppled it skew-wise, and tossed it up again, and never left it in peace for a moment; they made a boil and pother of white bubbling water round its streaming sides. And all the time the buoy, with the sound of a great clock that strikes, rang (and paused) and rang (and paused) and rang.

The wind was free enough now, and we flew. We left a wake of tumbling soap-sud foam astern that would really have done credit to a steamer, and the dinghy—towing half out of the water—had a breaker of white lather under her bows as she strained at her twin painters.

Landguard Point stood to seaward. It looks an impudent tongue of land, when one appreciates its contour on the map, resolutely protruded like that,

and compelling the Orwell and Stour to empty the wrong way, all against the tidal current. But it makes the haven. It defends the anchorage against the quarrelsome sea, and it has also naturally been used to defend the roadstead against the King's enemies and other persons "evil-disposed." It is an obvious place for a fort. When first the fort was erected is not precisely known: it was reconstructed in the reign of James I, the king who stuttered and meant well and had the Bible translated, and it came into prominence when Charles II was king, a king who did not stutter and "never said a foolish thing," a king also who "never did a wise one." In the latter reign the Dutch (who had possessed a wholesome respect for Cromwell and Blake) made themselves quite arrogantly familiar with our more intimate home-waters. Their most famous visit was the one paid, uninvited, to the Medway, but they also came here. The great guns of the Dutch fleet were playing on the fort, and about three thousand men were landed. The landing party had no more prospect of storming the fort than they had of gliding on cherubs' wings over the estuary into Harwich, so they made themselves comfortable where the shingle bank covered them from sight and the fort could not see them. Then they blazed away with their small-arms, mostly (as the chronicler said with his grim chuckle) "at the firmament." For all the effect they produced they might still be there; they could not hurt the fort, nor could the fort hurt them. But then a useful little galliot of our own, a two-gun ship, came into

the picture; she tossed over a few cannon-balls which sent the pebbles scattering about the Dutchmen's ears. The Dutchmen in their baggy breeches looked at one another with round, wide-open eyes. Gutturally indignant, they scattered like the pebbles; they got themselves out of the way of the flying balls and brickbats. They decamped, and the great invasion was over.

These sturdy Dutchmen in reality were fine fighters and fine sailors. At our best we found them formidable and worthy antagonists. And, even in the degenerate days of Charles II, we were still foes worthy of them, and were able to meet the Dutchmen off the Zeeland as well as the Harwich shore.

It was off the Zeeland coast that the little *Fan-fan*, a two-gun ship just built at Harwich, made a name for herself. She had been built with small draught to clear the Harwich shoals, "much infested with Dutch picaroons," and now she had accompanied the fleet to the other side. The English and Dutch fleets lay looking at one another, out of gunshot range, and absolutely becalmed. A majestic spectacle surely, with towering hulls and great sails set, and all idly reflected in smooth blue water, the two fleets brooded, impotently defiant. Then little *Fan-fan*, getting her oars into commission, went forward and impudently bombarded de Ruyter's flagship, "to the great laughter and delight of our fleet and the indignation and reproach of the enemy." She had a couple of shot between wind and water for her trouble, which was not more than her deserts.

The square of water between Shotley and Harwich and Landguard Marshes is in history "Orwell Haven"; to the southward is Harwich Harbour. It is recorded that, in this spacious anchorage, upwards of one hundred sail of war, with frigates, and between three and four hundred colliers, have been riding at one time without endangering one another. Those old colliers would probably be the old coastwise brigs which have completely disappeared. Whatever they were, they probably wished that "the sail of war, with frigates" were further off. If men were wanted in fierce haste, the press-gangs would sweep the colliers clean; and the ships would possibly be left, riding to anchor, deserted and tenantless save for the cockroaches and scurrying rats until the war was over.

Even on shore, any stout burgess, if ever he had served on shipboard, might be impressed. If, boy-like, a youngster had run away to sea years ago and had served for only a year or two, still he might be impressed in middle life—though now grown to the bearded respectability of a merchant and man of substance.

The yacht had made short work of her passage up Harwich Haven, and was fairly abreast of the eastern side of the town itself, with glimpses visible of light-vessels, hauled up for repairs, among the old roofs and windows of grey old houses. Over the bows was the Guard Buoy, clanging its hammers on the bell certainly, but with much less conviction than the Bell Buoy at Beach End lower down. These were sheltered waters.

"Orwell or Stour?"

"May as well take the Stour. Wrabness will be snug. If the wind veers north-westerly and still blows, she'll be putting bowsprit under at once. But then we can shift round into the Orwell. That's just the beauty of this place."

For Harwich as an anchorage I have no fancy, seeing that there are places snugger and more secluded so close at hand. Besides, Harwich is a township of such perverse possibilities. Sir Charles Lyell, the geologist, promised that Nature should make an island of it, by sending in the sea at the back; and certain it is that in the year 1723 the sea came in at the front. The town was "overflown with great tides." Water ran through the West Street so high that boats rowed thereat as high as the Spread-Eagle ale-house, "at which door some men

sat in their boat and drank several pots of beer." At the Guard Buoy we hauled our wind, and began the turn to windward past Harwich and Parkeston.

When not "overflown with tides," Harwich is a busy and quite deserving place. It was long a dockyard town, and had its sound traditional craftsmen. King Henry VIII knew of them, and Harwich shipwrights and caulkers were induced (by press-gang) to migrate to Woolwich and work on the *Great Harry*, then on the stocks; but later on, Harwich regularly built its own ships for the Royal Navy, ship after ship, third to sixth rates. For several centuries the local pundits protected their shipways and dockyard frontage by the primitive expedient of sinking ships as breakwaters on both sides; and here at Harwich, during the centuries of sail, ships would put in for cleaning, caulking, tallowing, and would be either careened or laid ashore. Here in the old time the shipyard hammers rang; here seamen, in knee-breeches and buckled shoes, scrambled over bulwarks and rigging; and here a red-cheeked captain, a fine figure in a gold-laced hat, came to look after the launch of the ship *Ipswich*, a third-rate, in 1694. Captain Benbow they called him; when next heard of he was an admiral.

The old dockyard had its changes of fortunes. Much used by the Commonwealth, it had fallen to a lower estate as years went by, and Sheerness—mere upstart beside it—ultimately drew away the more important work. Harwich was often starved for money; and once, when the dockyard clock

stopped, there was no help for the timepiece, and someone sorrowfully put on record that the yard clock would have to remain unmended "till money be more flush."

Close-hauled now, the yacht had made her leg across to the Shotley shore, and was coming about. A great target used for gunnery practice was there among the big mooring-buoys, and a long grey-hulled cruiser was also moored. Neat as a new pin, she looked the very picture of efficiency. If she could only have been turned loose here a few centuries ago, she would soon have swept the coast clean of the pirates that used to be its bane and tribulation. The pirates had no scruples about dropping with a falcon-like swoop right into the haven itself upon some ship at anchor. No man could say them nay. From the fourteenth century onwards, Commissions would come down to Harwich to "enquire"; but, when they retired to consider their report, the pirates reappeared and ransacked everything. In days of Queen Elizabeth the scandal was so compelling that the Vice-Admiral of Essex himself equipped a vessel and sailed gallantly forth to suppress the pirates; but the hunt opened such golden vistas that he became pirate himself and prospered mightily. Then someone else surprised him unawares, and the Vice-Admiral in his draggled finery was laid by the heels.

Harwich looked sternly modern to-day. Wind-scoured and stark, the grey town grouped itself under the old church spire, an uncompromising regiment of roofs without a touch of sentiment or softer thought.

In blurring haze or the gold of sunset, Harwich can dream like many a better town ; but not to-day. It was well suited in this weather by the black smoke that blew across it, the stern lines of wharf or jetty with their drab modern humanity, pigmy-small, its waterside yards crammed with junk-store rubbish, and its steam ferry-boats that plied busily, smoking and foaming over the grey water. Out of character with mediæval romance, it yet possessed its own stern modern beauty. There was an air of dogged vigour which had its own virtue.

Close-hauled, the yacht went by. Her next board had brought her across to Parkeston Quay, with its derricks and moored steamers and sounds of clanging and of whistles. The Esbjerg packet-steamer was just swinging at her berth as we put our helm down and fetched across towards Suffolk again, " thriddling " our course between the moored relics of the war. Creaking at their chains, disconsolately sagging in line with the tide, the dull grey vessels are truly derelict. They had for fellow the grey skies and surly wind, while the green tide-water chattered and broke murkily about their bows and mooring-buoys.

" This wind is taking off, surely."

" So it is, but we ain't shaking no reefs out. Not for me. It's not far to go, and we've got the tide. Shaking reefs out before you're quite certain brings a hurricane."

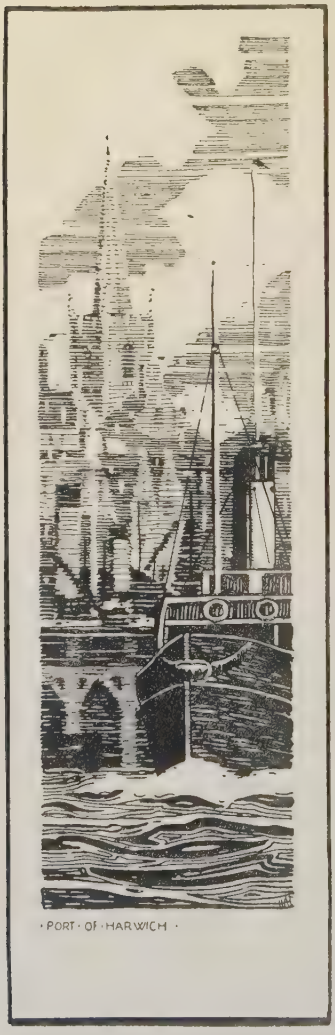
Grimacing in approval of my own wisdom I put down the helm, and—as the yacht shot into the wind—let go the jib sheet. Round she came in her

long curve with the track of broken white water astern, filled on the other tack, and heeled negligently to the lighter wind as she lay away for the Essex shore again. The channel is unmarked and unbuoyed, but it is straight, and can be judged by eye —the use of the lead being hardly necessary. There is plenty of room.

The last of the forlorn grey hulls was left astern, and inland Essex was over the bows. Rather morose in this weather, even desolate and repellent, it lay, but one touch of the alchemy of sunlight would wake it with a sudden leap of vitality. The cliff of Wrabness, tree-covered, was now over the port bow, and the tide was nearly full. The channel lies close inshore, under the lee to-day of these tree-covered cliffs; the foresail was already furled, and the lead-line was plying as she slipped shoreward on the wind. At the four-fathom mark she was sent up slatting into the wind's eye and the anchor was let go. At low water the little sandy beach would be close beside her; and here she lay.

As ebb tide uncovered the sand, the sunlight sent its magical fingers over the landscape. A glittering touch at first, and a patch of leaping colour here and there; then, with its full array, the sunlight came.

The ebb tide is quite strenuous; until the flats have uncovered, the strong water swirls wrathfully seaward in a long, gurgling, mighty flood. The sun was setting, and the wind was dying. The earth cliffs grew darker, and the trees, deep green, were of richer tone. Finally, in the afterglow, the wind was gone and the only sound was wash and chatter of



tide, and voice of birds, occasionally talkative, where the flats were beginning to uncover.

. . . . .

The earlier part of the evening had been reminiscent of another such evening on these same waters. Beating down the Orwell in a brisk southerly wind, the yacht was off Collimer Point at sunset, and was at Shotley Spit an hour later. Save for the brown afterglow in the western sky, night had set in. We will return to Orwell Haven, and accompany her thence, this time in twilight and night.

Harwich, with its steeple and clustered masts, had been visible through the twilight, softly lined, an old town full of mystery. It seemed in posture indeed as if it brooded upon its greater past—the walled

fort, the dockyard town, the mustering-place of vanished fleets. It was an isolated outpost then, and its inhabitants knew their dangers—if once the fierce foreign faces and the burnished armour came flooding in through the dawn or under the twilight, like a nightmare. "Ye should have seen the women and children work with shovels at the bulwarks there," said the Commissioner, reporting in 1539.

And Harwich over there in the twilight is the Harwich beside which Hawkins' *Dainty* brought up, after she had wickedly captured a great carrack, *Madre de Dios*, on the high seas off the Azores. The little Elizabethan ship, demure enough now with her square and lateen sails clewed up, swung quietly to the tide under just such dusky sunsets as this, while her roystering company was ashore, noisily reminiscent. In the leaning lamp-lit taverns they held the townsfolk in tongue-tied wonder. In the cobbled alleys they were eyed by wondering children. And most of all, the town was in riot and in ferment of wonder when they brought ashore their booty—their wealth undreamed of, preposterous. Gold they had in plenty, but still they sold their topazes and amethysts in Harwich streets, their costly porcelain, their carpets, their delicate silk, their cinnamon, cloves and pepper. It was like a fair, a pandemonium—fierce voices and flushed faces under the guttering lamps of Harwich streets and taverns.

Harwich town was gorged with loot and was well content. But Harwich town did not sleep so snug o' nights a year or two later when the armies of Parma were on the Flanders shore opposite, and

the great Armada was anchored in Calais roads. Howard and Drake and Hawkins were out there beyond the dark grey sea-line; but the Armada was mighty and news belated and uncertain.

Welcome, therefore, was the Royal ship with emblazoned sails which came foaming from seaward into Harwich Harbour and, throwing all aback, put off a long-boat before coming to anchor. Men crowded to the quay and jostled to see it. A pale-faced nobleman, cloaked and spurred, was away galloping London-ward; his tidings were for a queen's ears, but one doubts not the great news was bruited. The Earl of Cumberland was away spurring to Tilbury, with the first authentic tidings from Lord Howard of the total defeat of the Spanish Armada.

As the yacht beat down to Shotley Spit in the late twilight, the breeze held. There would be a night-breeze for her now, as the wind had not fallen with the sundown. In the blurred greyness of the twilight it was hardly possible to see the Spit Buoy, an unlighted mass; while, twitching and quivering in warm dusk behind it, were points of light innumerable in Harwich town and waterways. The deep brown quality of the afterglow, soberly rich, had given place to night: warm-hued no longer, the water that heaved smoothly around us was hardly visible except where those points of light sent each a minute trickle of gold, twisting and untwisting in a hurry along the pattern of the waves below them. Our side-lights were up, and it was night. The strong seaward tide drew us smoothly to windward

as we beat to and fro; the buoy had soon been weathered and Stour opened.

The *flick* and twinkle of the Channel buoys, with rhythmical return and eclipse, and the long red beam of Landguard light—these were all at work to shepherd the ships that enter. But, little more than a century ago, it was almost as dark on moonless nights here as any forsaken tidal creek of the coast-line. True, there was the old coal-fire to lead vessels in from the shipway clear to southward of the Platters and Andrews, but once Landguard had been rounded there was nothing. The old coal-fire light was established by Sir William Batten in 1666; he was

allowed to levy for its maintenance a tax on coals and foreign shipping that entered Harwich—and he amassed a comfortable little fortune. A century ago there were two lights; a coal-fire above and a light of oil lamps or "six one-pound candles" below; kept in one they cleared the shoals that stretched wickedly seaward, "not without great danger and terror to mariners."

A seaport town has a charm of its own, seen from the dark water, with its tangle of lights, and dark shapes of anchored shipping. Harwich itself was not riotously bejewelled; the waterside lights have nowadays drifted up to Parkeston. Harwich in the dusk was sober and old-fashioned and reticent. It was the old town beside which Nelson once anchored in *Medusa*, and had view of it through the ample stern-windows of the Admiral's cabin. Frail and war-worn, he did not go ashore, although the volunteers were drawn up to receive him, and "the people ready to draw my carriage."

The ebb tide, which had encouraged the yacht to sidle beam-wise while beating down the Orwell, was now swirling busily past her bows; sturdily enough, it was combating her entry to the Stour. But the night-breeze had become free, and the yacht was reaching. With her mainsheet run out, she gathered steadfast way, and the water swirled bickering and chattering aft; it broke into foam, with ghostly grey patterns that fringed swiftly and spread, lost in the darkness astern.

Anchored vessels loomed up darkly and slid astern of us; the Harwich town lights—no longer

abeam—were on the quarter, and the glitter and business of Parkeston began to fill the picture. It was a night of heavy holiday-traffic on the railway, and four or five packet-steamers were lavishly lighted, as they lay alongside the quay or moored in the long tier. Others were grouped in the tier, vast hulls in darkness. There was a clatter of derricks and rattle of chains all along the quays, there were shouts and murmurs; engines were noisy, bells clanged and whistles were blown. It was a world of life. Then the great fog-horn of a steamship boomed, dominant over every other sound, prelude to slow thrash of a propeller. The water below was alive with reflected golden imagery of lights, confused and interwoven, and in the dark sky, above it all, was smoke, belching more darkly than the darkness. All the chatter and clatter and light of it was now abeam and was beginning to slide into the past. It was a wonderland of lights and movement.

One red port light was really stationary no more; the steamer, almost imperceptibly, was under way. Stately in her gradual clearance, she began to slide seaward in the ghostly wake of the old hoys that plied to and from Holland through the old and stirring days. The packet service has been regular since about 1650, but Harwich has been a regular port of embarkation since Harwich existed. Seaward they sailed, Dutch packets or British. Heavily armed, they were ready to run the gauntlet of the privateers and pirates that stood off and on interminably outside, and their captains were seldom loth to set the match or linstock lighting. Then Dutch

William the King, crossing frequently, came upon the scene. He puckered his lean face, sallow under the great peruque, and croaked grim wisdom. The captains were fonder of a fight than of efficient passages, he said. He disarmed them all; they were ships with a good turn of speed, and must trust to their heels instead of their teeth. As usual, he was right. The passages were no less exciting, but it was chase now, and flight instead of fight; and the service was greatly improved. In later years the sailing packets died hard; they continued to ply for years after the steamship service of the nineteenth century had been established.

Parkeston with its lights had slipped astern of us, and the yacht was now sailing into a gulf of unmitigated darkness, darker threefold by contrast with the dazzle of yellow light which she had left. The noise and the glitter ebbed smoothly into the broadening night-landscape astern, and her bowsprit probed more deeply into that unbroken night to westward. Compass course was W. $\frac{1}{2}$ N., and the wind was steady. She drove through the running ebb, unerringly direct. An hour slid by.

The night was moonless, and the low land lay like an indistinguishable blur of darkness. Gradually it heaped a little and darkened to southward; more and more definite, it swelled up with long whale-like bulk nearer at hand. Here, beside Wrabness, in a fathom and a half of water, the anchor was let go.

"We want to get away at top of the tide at six in the morning, but it's too pleasant to turn in yet. Isn't that the moon?"

The waning moon was rising to seaward. As we leaned lazily, silent with the beauty and the isolation of it, we watched the silver pathway grow confident upon the water. Wind-ruffled still, it was scattered silver, broken and again broken.

A vast yawn gave signal for a stumbling descent below, and for four hours of even breathing, while the tide flowed landward, and re-brimmed the shallows and flooded the banks. Dawn broke greyly upon it, and, as the yacht swung to the morning ebb, we were both on deck again.

The wind was lighter, and the grey water smooth. Reflections wavered, serpentine, and drifted apart and re-formed. The yacht stole smoothly away, with a light breeze, along this broad face of the ebb that swam seaward with all its drifted seaweed and flotsam and bubbles pouring down through Harwich Haven to the sea. Parkeston and Harwich with their shipping—with their smoke and wharves and grey roofs—drifted astern in grey daylight, and round the Guard Buoy we shaped course for Landguard.

Immemorially the same, the grey tides rise and fall, and the fishing-boats anchored between Harwich and Dovercourt swing as the tide changes. The cutter-rigged smacks to-day were pointed northward over the ebb; a century and more ago the smacks of Harwich were broad-beamed luggers, with open wells amidships; earlier yet they were doggers, manned by hard-fisted capable seamen of the fourteenth century. Harwich men of those old centuries, away at the Iceland fishery, were "turbulent and

piratical" and destroyed "nets, gins, and instruments" of the peaceful Danes. In home-waters they were piratical no less, and swarmed like locusts over any ship in distress, openly exultant. But always they were seamen elect; and for centuries Harwich men were renowned as North Sea pilots. And after all their wanderings, some grey tide which was their last would bring them home again to Orwell Haven and Harwich Town, while other men's ships made and cleared the harbour with the same grey flood and ebb as now.

Having turned to windward past Landguard Point, the yacht bore up, and eased away her mainsheet, bound seaward.

THE END

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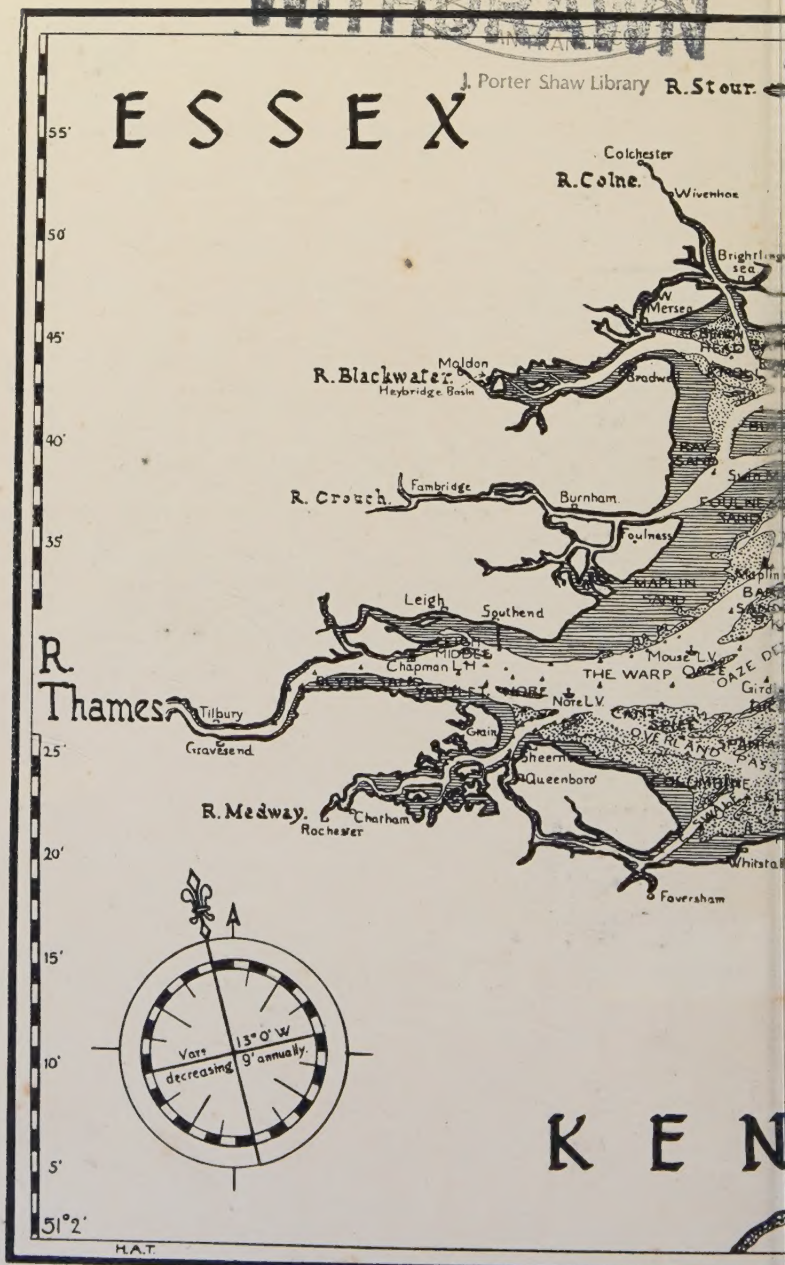

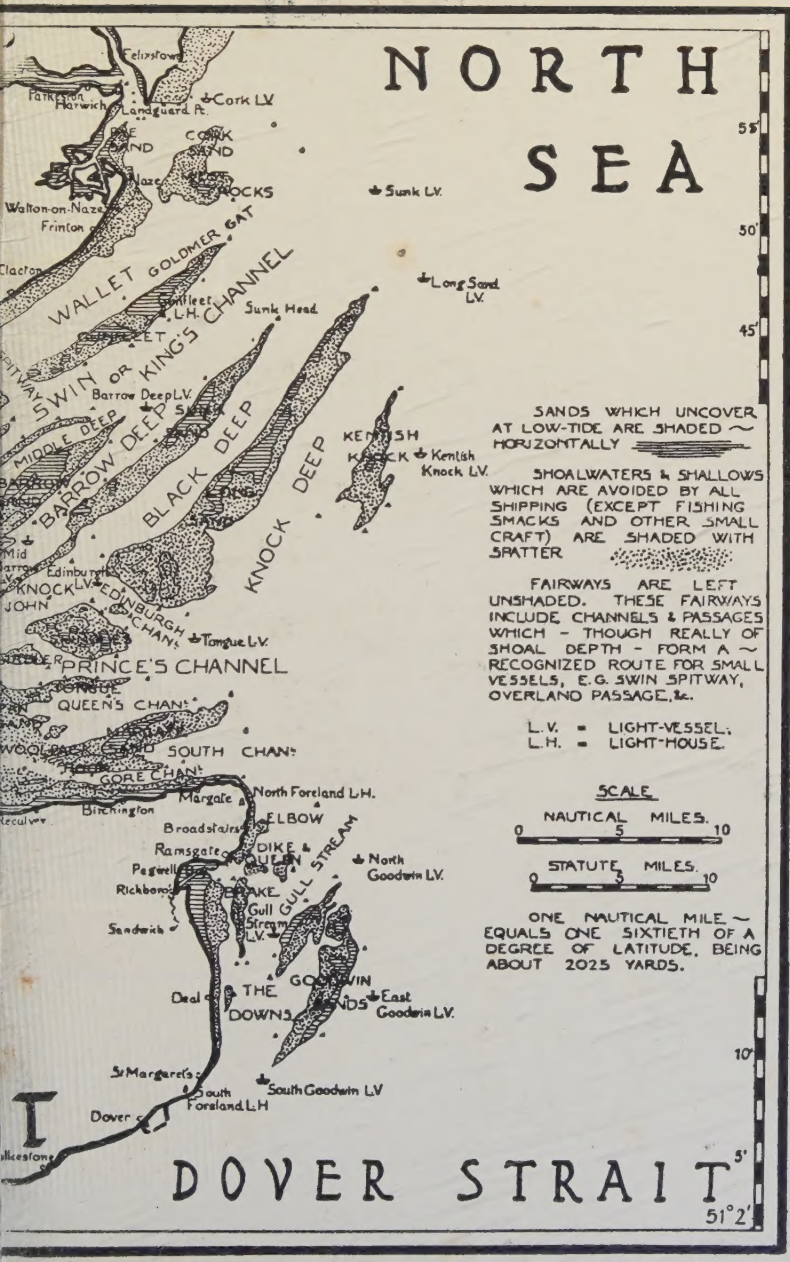

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